

HM Government

Safeguarding in Schools Webinar: Reducing Parental Conflict

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**Safeguarding
in Schools**

Knowledgepool
Part of Capita plc

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Today's webinar...

- Building confidence and competence in this area, school staff will be in a better position to:
 - **identify** where relationship distress exists,
 - **explore** with parents the causes of their conflict and
 - **support** them to develop ways of communicating that are more constructive, or refer where appropriate for specialist services



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Quick introductions

Name

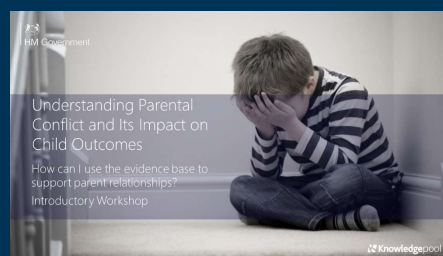
Job role

How much do I know already about parental conflict?

What stops you talking to parents about their relationship?

What stops parents talking to you about their relationship?

What do I need to get out of today?



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Domestic Abuse is Different to Parental Conflict

- By having conversations about relationships, staff are better placed to identify parental conflict including domestic abuse
- When exploring or addressing parental conflict, continue to be vigilant and ensure there are no indicators of domestic abuse, including coercive control
- Should any concerns be identified that could indicate domestic abuse, local policies and procedures to address domestic abuse should always be followed and the priority should be managing any potential risk of harm
- Be curious and alert to an imbalance of power within a relationship that adversely affects one person and is used as a form of control; or where at least one person feels fear – these could be indicators of an abusive relationship
- If you would like more information about domestic abuse, please speak with Southwark's Safeguarding in Schools Team.



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What the evidence tells us:

Parental conflict, which is **frequent, intense and poorly resolved**, (whether parents are together or separated) places children at risk of poor social, emotional and educational outcomes.

Couples in relationships that are characterised by hostility and distress are typically less sensitive and emotionally responsive to their children's needs.

Offering evidence-based support with the parent-child relationship alone is likely to be ineffective, where there is conflict between parents.



Parental conflict which is frequent, intense, and poorly resolved

University of Essex. Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2018). *Understanding Society: Waves 1-8, 2009-2017 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009*. [data collection]. 11th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-12>

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Family Formation and Relationships Quality

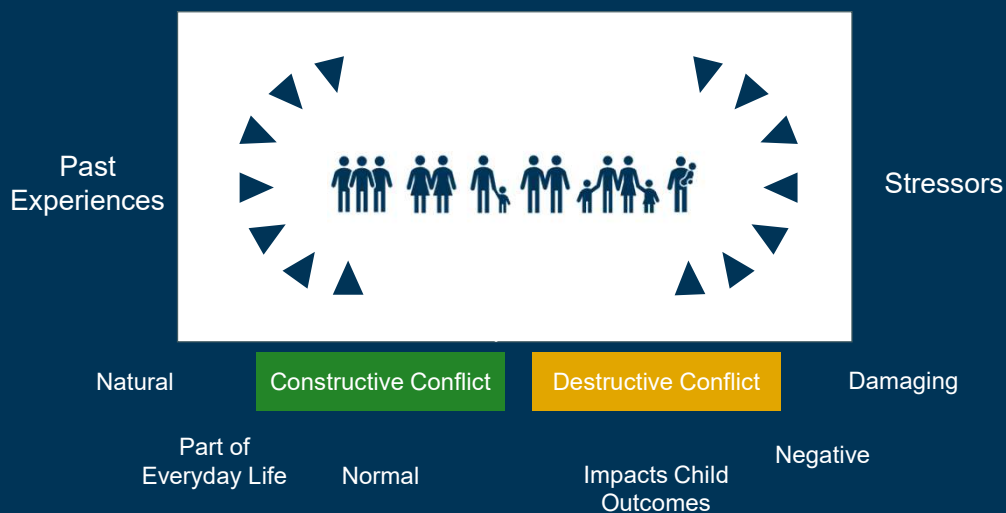
Research supports the view that most co-parenting relationships are mother/father. We also see different family dynamics, including:

- Extended Families
- Adopted Families
- Step / Blended Families
- Grandparent Families
- Same Sex Families



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Conflict in relationships is a reality....



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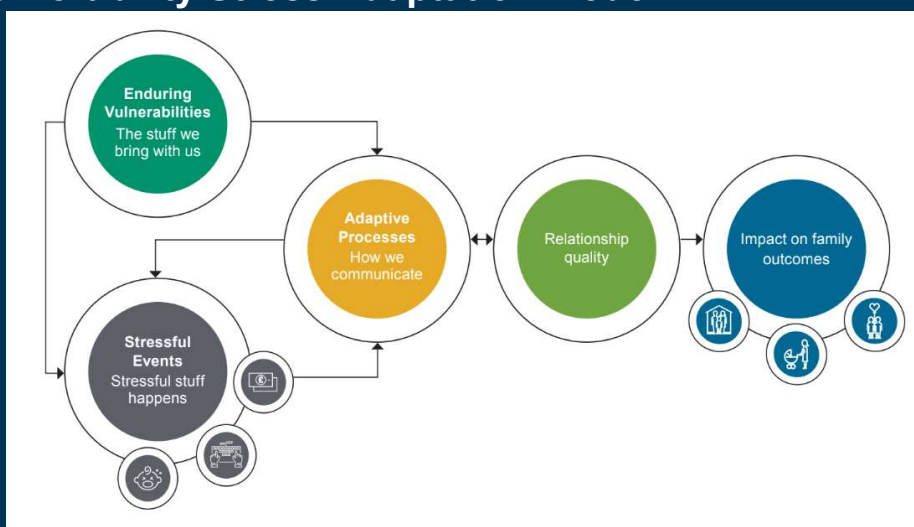
What can cause conflict in relationships?

Money and Debt	Parenting Style	Household Chores	Relationships with wider family
Work or unemployment	Infidelity	Social Media	Sex and Intimacy
Housing	Friends	Debt	Babies



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How relationships change - Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model



(Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model)

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Internalising
sad, withdrawn
anxious depressed

How does destructive conflict manifest in children/ young people?

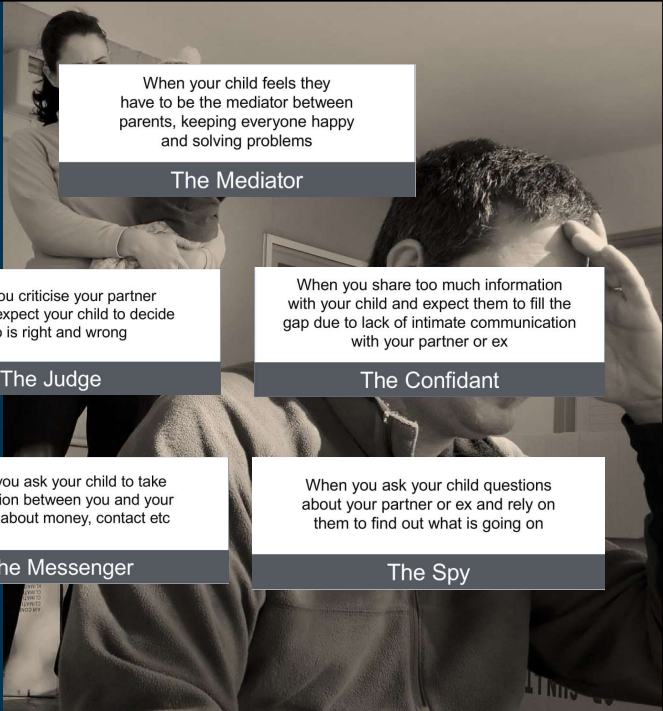
Externalising
aggression, behaviour problems, acting out

Parent-Child
provides emotional support, excuses, care for siblings

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Children in the Middle

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



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

The Mediator

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

The Judge

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

The Confidant

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

The Messenger

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

The Spy

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Skills for addressing conflict

- Listening before questioning
- Be interested, professionally curious, identify what is really going on
- Really listen – avoid thinking about the next thing you want to say.
- Avoid making assumptions – be aware of unconscious bias
- Stay away from “fix it” mode
- Don’t take sides
- Make sure you allow both parents to share their views
- Reflect back what you have heard to check your understanding – what we hear is not always what was said!

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Starting the Conversation

- 01.** Is the problem you are experiencing causing stress, tension or arguments between you and your partner?
- 02.** How often do arguments about the problem happen?
- 03.** Are you able to find a solution to the stress, tension or arguments that you are both happy with?

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Tools for working with parents in conflict

Identifying parental conflict

- ✓ Relationship scaling tool
- ✓ Stages of relationships

Exploring the causes of the conflict

- ✓ What's going on for us? (VSA)
- ✓ Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour
- ✓ Our Typical Day

Supporting constructive conflict communication

- ✓ Constructive or destructive
- ✓ Children in the middle role cards
- ✓ I statements



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Identifying conflict -

Relationship scale - how are we doing ?

How does each parent rate their situation on the scale from happy to distressed?

This can highlight differences in how they are experiencing their relationship



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Identifying conflict -



Relationship scale - how do we change this?

It can also be used to help parents think about where they are now and what they would like to be using solution-focused questions:

- How would things look, if it were better?
- What would be happening?
- What would have to change?
- What would you and your partner be doing differently?
- What would you be thinking or feeling?
- What might get in the way?
- When you have fallen out before, what helped you to make it up?

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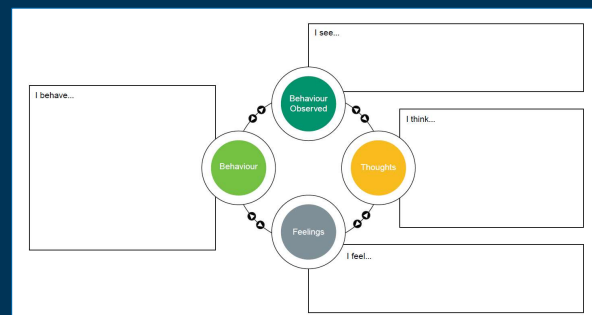
Exploring the causes of conflict -

Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour Exercise

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

This can be used to help couples understand each others behaviour.

When you ignore me when the football is on, I think this means you don't want to be around me, this makes me feel unloved, I slam doors in the kitchen to let you know I am not happy.



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Supporting constructive communication -

Arguments are like fire: for parents

1) You can think of arguments like a fire.

The logs are the things you argue about most. Even when you're getting on well, the logs are still there.

Some common ones are:

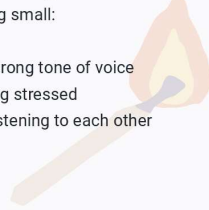
- Money
- Friends
- Housework
- Sex
- Children



bit.ly/logsandfire

2) The match can be anything that starts an argument. It's often something small:

- The wrong tone of voice
- Feeling stressed
- Not listening to each other



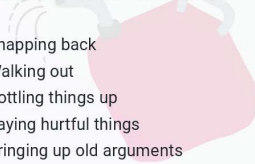
4) There are also things we can do to stop the argument getting worse. This is like putting water on the fire:

- Taking a break
- Listening
- Saying sorry
- Having a hug



3) Once the argument has started, we can make things worse by the way we respond. This can add fuel to the fire:

- Snapping back
- Walking out
- Bottling things up
- Saying hurtful things
- Bringing up old arguments



Here's a few things to try:

- Can you think of what your logs are?
- The next time you argue, see if you can tell when you're pouring fuel.
- Think about ways you could pour water, and try them out.

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Supporting constructive communication -

You versus I Statements

You care more about work than your own family

You leave me to do all the tough parenting, so the kids like you more than me

You're always on the phone texting, on Facebook.
You care more about someone else's opinion than mine

An **"I" message** or **"I" statement** is a style of communication that focuses on the feelings or beliefs of the speaker rather than thoughts and characteristics that the speaker attributes to the listener

Construct an **"I"** statement which takes the phrase from accusing to disclosing

At a basic level consider using the following framework to create I statements

I feel

Because

When.....

What I need.....

I feel anxious when.....

I need help with.....

I feel anxious when.....

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Supporting constructive communication -

Getting On Better 2021

The magic ratio: for parents




How many positive moments does it take to balance each negative moment?

Flip the card to find out.



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Supporting constructive communication -

Getting On Better 2021

Harmful and helpful arguments: for parents




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



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Harmful and helpful arguments: for parents

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

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.

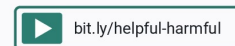
How to practice a soft start-up

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.



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In summary, what have we learned...

Identify Parental Conflict

Explore the subject with the parent

Support by doing the following:

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OnePlusOne Self Help Digital support Available for Parents Paid for by Southwark Council

Southwark.opo.org.uk



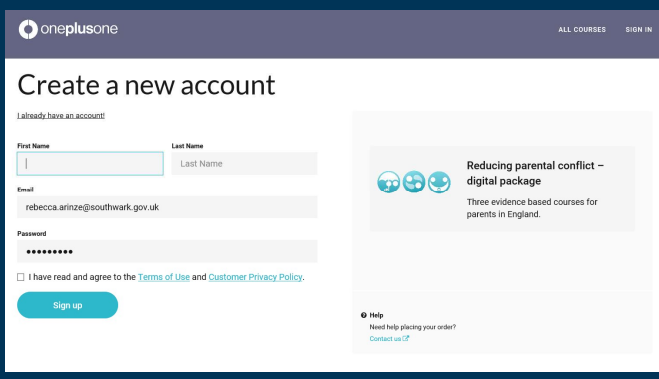
- *Access the link whenever you like*
- *Receive certificate at the end of the course*

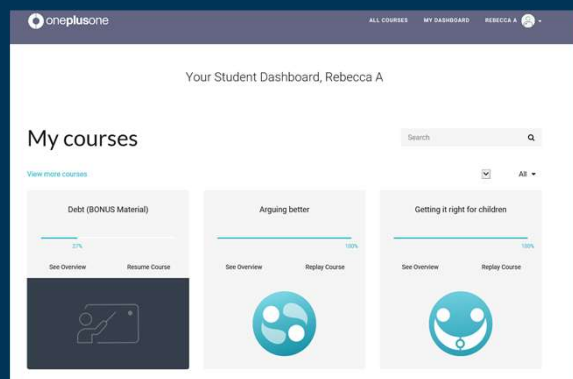
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Digital Portal Practice Session

Please log onto the site: Southwark.opo.org.uk





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<https://www.coram.org.uk/news/coram-launches-family-harmony-toolkit-to-address-harmful-impact-of-family-conflict-on-childrens-mental-health/>

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Question Time

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Evaluation Forms - Please Kindly Complete

Reducing Parental Conflict Training
Evaluation 2025/2026



Southwark Safeguarding in
Schools Webinar - Feedback

