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# Putting parental relationships at the heart of Family Hubs

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# What does the evidence tell us?

## Reducing parental conflict is important in improving children's outcomes

### Relationship difficulties are common

- In 2018 almost one in eight children in couple-parent families were living with a parent who reported relationship distress.
- In 2020, it is estimated that there were 2.4 million separated families that include 3.6 million children in the United Kingdom.

### Impact on children's outcomes

- When conflict between parents is frequent, intense and poorly resolved, it can put children's mental and physical health at risk including related outcomes such as peer relationships and attainment.

### Life events

- A new baby, a new school, a bereavement, separation or divorce can all lead to an increased stress on relationships.

### Some families are more at risk

- Misusing alcohol may increase the risk of relationship difficulties.
- Experiencing mental health problems may lead to stress in a relationship.
- Struggling with employment and poverty, or other financial worries, can lead to relationship difficulties.
- Parents who have a child/children with SEND may experience additional stresses in their relationship which could lead to damaging conflict.

### Address the root cause of difficulties and save money

- Interventions to improve parenting and the parent-child relationship are less likely to be effective if there is existing parental conflict.
- Interventions focussed on children's challenging behaviour without understanding the causes are likely to be less effective.

## Supporting parental relationships is everyone's business

# The role of Family Hubs – some practical steps

<b>Strategic planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review the local Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool<sup>1</sup> as part of the Family Hub system assessment.</li><li>• Include data on RPC risk factors when completing your Family Hub Needs Assessment.</li><li>• Listen to the lived experience of separated parents and fathers in developing Family Hub plans.</li></ul>
<b>Workforce development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Train the Family Hub workforce to ask about parent's relationship and signpost to support where appropriate.</li><li>• Normalise conversations about relationships not just when there is an identified problem.</li><li>• Support staff to recognise and respond to relationship distress regardless of their own personal experiences.</li></ul>
<b>Leadership, governance &amp; partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review and monitor plans for activity to support parental relationships across all stakeholders.</li><li>• Senior leaders across all partners champion activity to encourage fathers to engage with relationship support.</li><li>• Raise awareness with and engage wider partners such as police and probation, housing, mental health, and substance misuse treatment services.</li></ul>
<b>Community services &amp; interventions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide awareness raising web-based and printed resources such as posters, leaflets and videos. Communicate the relationship support offer, including outreach, to all staff and parents ensuring this includes a face-to-face and a digital offer.</li><li>• Include relationship support in plans for developing parent/carer panels.</li><li>• Provide screening questions to be used by all staff to support the identification of harmful parental conflict and ensure all assessment processes include curious questions on the parental relationship.</li></ul>
<b>Outcomes &amp; evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support all partners in the Family Hub to record parental conflict when this is identified as a need, and collect and analyse local data to better understand the link between parental conflict and child outcomes.</li><li>• Incorporate evaluation of the impact of training and outcome measures from relationship support interventions into Family Hub evaluation plans.</li></ul>

**Supporting parental relationships is everyone's business**

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/reducing-parental-conflict-planning-tool>

## What do some local leaders and parents say?



Reducing the impact of parental conflict on children is everyone's business. That's why Leeds is committed to embedding support for parents experiencing relationship difficulties as early as possible. We see the developments around Family and Community Hubs as essential in supporting this work. We expect everyone coming into contact with parents and carers across the wider Children's Services partnership to have the confidence and skills to initiate conversations about relationships and provide a non-judgemental and helpful response."

Councillor Fiona Veneer, Cabinet Member for Children & Families, Leeds City Council



Gateshead are seeking to develop a network of Family Hubs with relationships at their core – safe, nurturing spaces where parents and co-parents can take time to reflect, learn and change conflict behaviours which impact negatively on their children.

Work to support relationships between parents whether living together or apart is one of the golden threads running through our Family Hub approach and is vital if we are to achieve improved outcomes in parenting capability, perinatal mental health and infant/child relationships."

Gavin Bradshaw, Early Help Service Manager, Gateshead MBC



My partner and I were constantly clashing when it came to our parenting styles. Parenting a child with additional needs is different from everything you have learned as a parent of a child who is neurotypical. Once we reached out to get some help it changed absolutely everything. We learned to work together as a team rather than against each other...how to communicate positively. We were able to better understand things that seem so simple and so obvious but so hard to recognise yourself, and then we could work on solutions together, to be able to really focus on our needs as individuals in a relationship rather than as parents made a massive difference."

Laura-Jayne, Parent

## What do some local leaders and parents say?



Parental conflict isn't always the presenting issue for families working with Early Help but it is often there under the surface when families are facing difficulties. I saw the difference when practitioners asked about relationships and were able to bring in specialist provision to build resilience and better equip families to cope. Parents may be wary of accessing support because they are worried about the perception professionals may have of relationship difficulties. The notion of relationship support is new to most people, including our practitioners, and having those conversations earlier helps to normalise getting support."

Anna Elliot, Supporting Families Coordinator, Ealing (formerly Westminster Council)



Family Hub development is providing the impetus to focus all services on being curious about the quality of family and parental relationships starting antenatally. Durham's Family Hub Implementation Plan has relationship support for families at its core, and partners are committed across the system to fully equip their workforce with the knowledge and skills to deliver this. We have clear pathways and an experienced coordinator who works with our Specialist Domestic Abuse Service handholding practitioners across the system in triaging and identifying safe and appropriate support to address relationship needs."

Fiona Smith, One Point Manager, Durham Council



As part of the holistic needs assessment, health visitors and school nurses have discussions with children, young people and families around parental relationships, including parental conflict. Training is provided to help staff to have strengths-based, appropriate and helpful conversations to inform these assessments."

Nikki Lawrence, Head of Children's Public Health Nursing (BNSSG) – Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and Gloucestershire