

# Reducing Parental Conflict Course



# Amity Relationship Essentials: The Toolkit

## Welcome and Introductions

- Introductions/ Health and Safety
- Hopes for the session
- Anything we might be worried about?
- Confidentiality and self care
- Session timings and breaks
- Working Agreement/Car Park
- Contact email: [earlyhelptraining@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:earlyhelptraining@lancashire.gov.uk)



# Amity Relationship Essentials: The Toolkit

## Agenda

- Domestic Abuse-Parental Conflict: Key Differences
- Evidence/Research surrounding Parental Conflict
- The impact/ effects of Parental Conflict- both on parents and child/ren
- BREAK
- Child Voice
- Courageous Conversations
- Using the Toolkit- ideas for activities

# Learning Outcomes



1. To understand parental conflict and what the research says about its impact family functioning and outcomes for both adults and children.
2. To recognise that there is a difference between domestic abuse and parental conflict.
3. To feel more confident about couple relationship quality enquiry in everyday practice.
4. To become familiar with the with Amity Relationship Solutions toolkit and its contents.
5. To understand the variety of tools and how to use them.
6. To confidently assess, plan, implement and review parental conflict support with couples and/or individuals.

# Parental Conflict and Domestic Abuse: The Difference



- When we talk about parental conflict we are not talking about domestic abuse, or something that is escalating towards domestic abuse.
- Domestic abuse involves a victim and a perpetrator.
- Parental conflict is caused by a breakdown in healthy communication that can turn toxic and can sometimes be aggressive or violent – but does not involve a power imbalance.

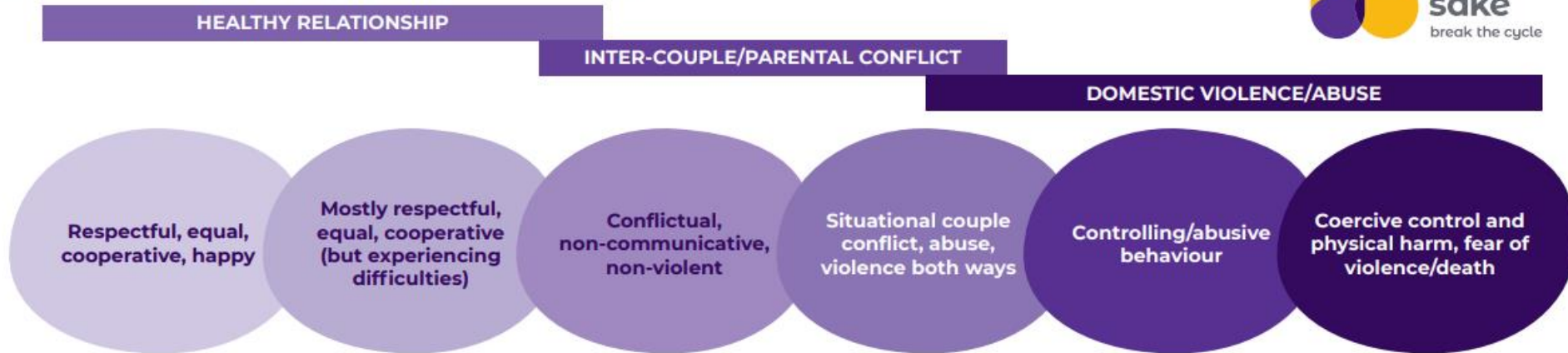
Ref: Page 6

**Both have a negative impact on children.**

# Parental Relationships Spectrum\*



[forbabysake](http://forbabysake.org.uk)



**SITUATION**  
All relationships have tricky moments, it's how they're experienced and resolved that matters

Children are experiencing constructive resolution of any arguments, characterised by mutual respect and emotional control

**SITUATION**  
Lack of open and honest communication; difficulties are minimised, not recognised or addressed

Children beginning to be affected by conflict between their parents

**ACTION**  
Early conversation initiated by Family Practitioner; direct to sources of self-help

**SITUATION**  
Conflict is frequent, intense and poorly resolved; parents emotionally unavailable to their partner and children; lack of consistency in parenting; feeling isolated; toxic atmosphere

Children being adversely affected

**ACTION**  
Family assessment; consider referral to local relationships support services

**SITUATION**  
Day to day unresolved and unresolvable conflicts; no consistent pattern of 'victim' or 'abuser'

Children being adversely affected; children may show signs of distress and their mental health/behaviour may be affected

**ACTION**  
Family assessment; contact your local helpline or the National Domestic Abuse Helpline for advice/access to services

**SITUATION**  
Clearer 'victim' and clearer 'abuser'

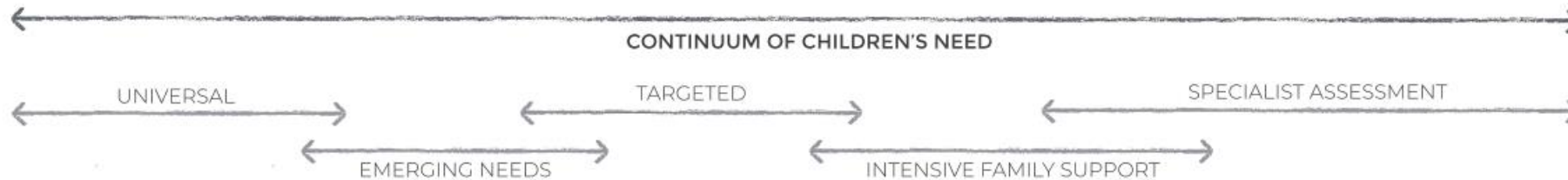
Children being significantly adversely affected; children's mental health and/or behaviour being affected

**ACTION**  
Family assessment; follow domestic abuse pathways/processes; refer to children's services

**SITUATION**  
Clear 'abuser' and clear 'victim' who is at significant risk of harm

Children at risk of significant harm; children being traumatised

**ACTION**  
Referral to specialist domestic abuse service(s); refer to children's services



Ref: Page 6



\*Adapted by The For Baby's Sake Trust from the model developed by Dr Mark Farrall, Ignition Creative Learning Limited  
[www.Forbabysake.org.uk](http://www.Forbabysake.org.uk)

February 2021

[Parental-Relationships-spectrum-pdf](#)

## Parental Relationships Spectrum\*



Where you are in contact with parents whose relationship is not healthy, use motivational interviewing and active listening techniques to explore whether they may be experiencing relationship conflict or domestic violence and abuse.

Consider asking some or all of the following questions to explore where on the spectrum diagram the relationship may sit.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>What aspects of your relationship trouble you?</b>   |  |
| <b>What would you change if you had the opportunity?</b>  |  |
| <b>How understanding is your partner?</b>   |  |
| <b>How safe do you feel at home and in your relationship?</b>   | Where the relationship is not healthy, this is a really important question to ask. If the parent clearly feels safe, this would tend to suggest they are experiencing parental conflict and may appreciate further discussion, information about sources of self-help and/or referral into local relationships support services.<br>If the parent says they are scared or sometimes feel unsafe at home, this would tend to indicate that the parents are on the domestic abuse side of the spectrum (including on the domestic abuse side of 'situational couple conflict and abuse') so a referral into local domestic abuse pathways and processes might be appropriate |
| <b>How confident do you feel about making decisions?<br/>How comfortable do you feel about expressing your own views and opinions?<br/>How much choice do you have about your own life and family life?</b> | These questions might indicate the presence of coercive or controlling behaviour with the relationship.  |
| <b>Where is the joy in your life?</b>   | Those in an abusive relationship may feel the lack of joy in their life and start to see the reality of the situation.   |
| <b>What would your children say about life at home?<br/>What changes, if any, have you noticed in your children's behaviour?</b>  | These questions could lead to a discussion about the impact on the children who may be experiencing conflict or abuse between their parents.   |
| <b>What prevents you from asking for support?</b>   | This question may lead to a discussion about how the parent and/or family could be enabled to access the support they need.  |

# Exploring the Evidence: Why Parental Relationships Matter



 **Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families



**The Impact  
of Parental  
Conflict on  
Children**

 **Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families



# What does the research say....

Over twice as likely (2.3 times) to experience homelessness

Twice as likely (2.0 times) to be in trouble with the police or spend time in prison

Almost twice as likely (1.9 times) to experience educational underachievement

Almost twice as likely (1.9 times) to experience not being with the other parent of their child/ren

Approaching twice as likely (1.8 times) to experience alcoholism

Approaching twice as likely (1.7 times) to experience teen pregnancy

Approaching twice as likely (1.7 times) to experience mental health issues

More likely (1.6 times) to experience debt

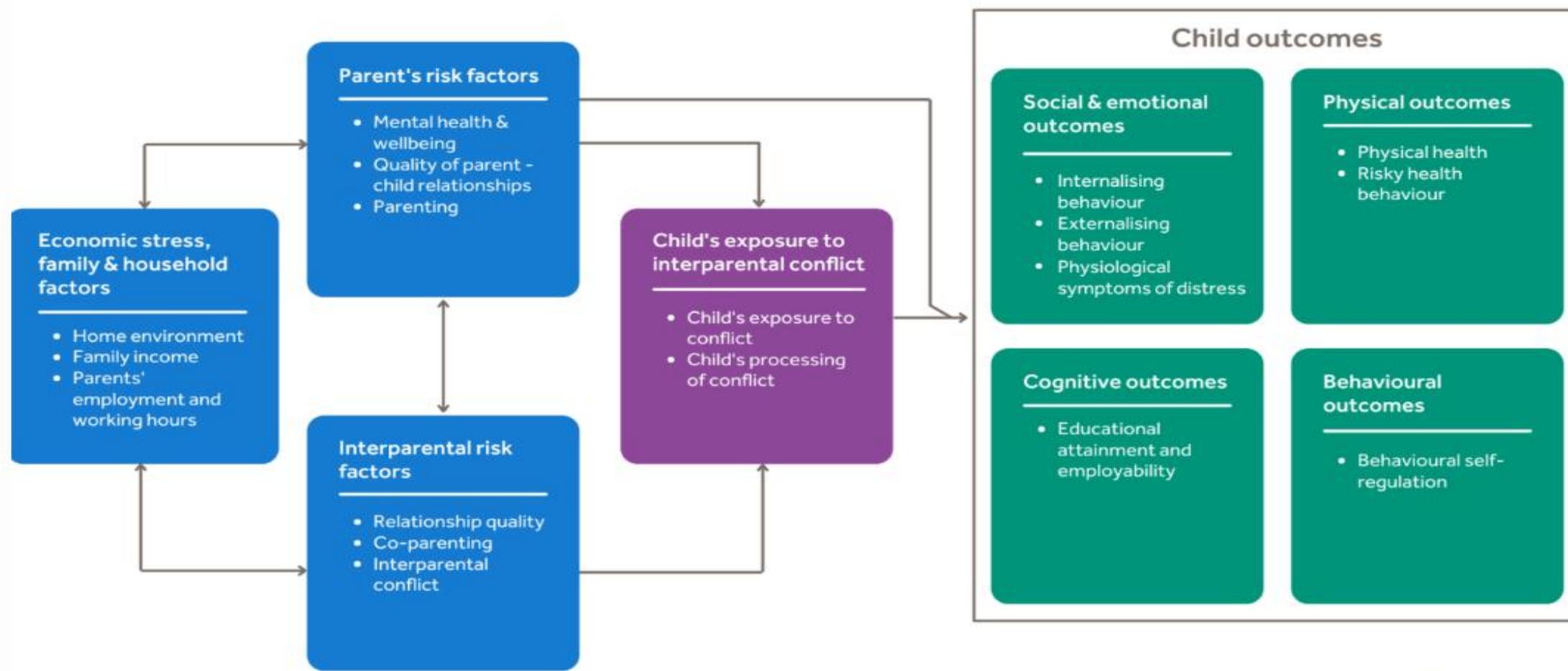
More likely (1.4 times) to experience being on benefits

Ref: Page 5

<https://reducingparentalconflict.eif.org.uk/#>

# Reducing parental conflict

## Outcomes framework



That 76% of male prisoners had an absent father (Prison Reform Trust) and three quarters (74%) of British adults whose parents never lived together when they were growing up say they rarely/never saw their father during their childhood, compared to just 1% of the same group who say they rarely/never saw their mother. (Centre for Social Justice March 2019)

## **Making the voice of the father louder - because Dads matter too**

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.

What the child hears  
upstairs

How are they feeling?



# Parental Relationships - why do we care about them?

Children exposed to frequent, destructive conflict are more likely to:

- EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY
- HAVE PHYSICAL HEALTH PROBLEMS
- DEVELOP BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS
- DO WORSE AT SCHOOL



There is a knock on effect in later life:

- ADULT RELATIONSHIPS
- PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING
- EMPLOYMENT

**The effects are real and can be long lasting...**

**What effects do you see happening to children exposed to frequently unresolved parental conflict?**

Ref: Page 7

# Relationship quality effects how parents...

- CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN
- ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT ROUTINE
- PROVIDE A STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT FOR OPTIMUM DEVELOPMENT
- PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SECURITY AND WARMTH
- ROLE MODEL HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



**It's hard to parent well  
when you are living with  
destructive conflict in  
your relationship**

Ref: Page 8

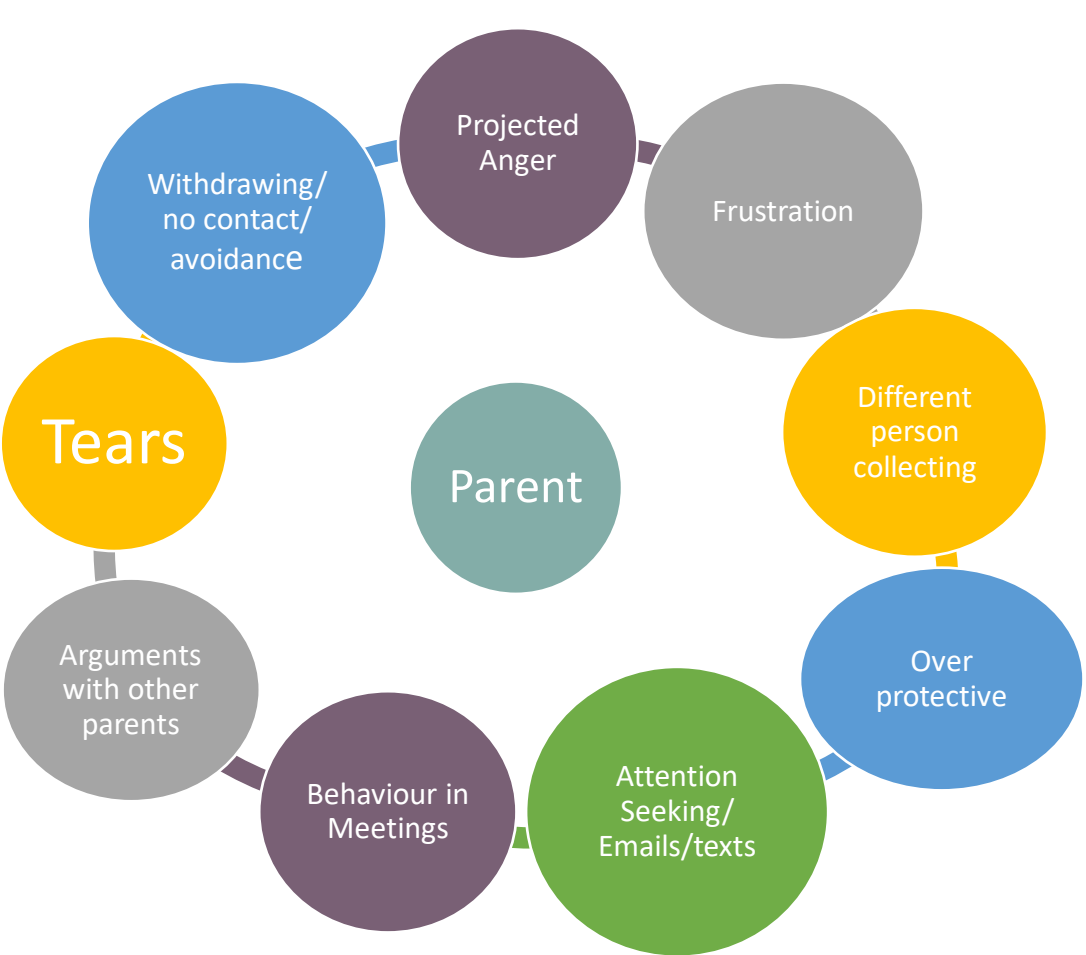
## Impact of parental conflict on parenting



**Your ability to parent well can be impacted by the struggle to manage unhelpful conflict and a child's needs**

Ref: Page 9/10

# How might conflict manifest in children and parents?





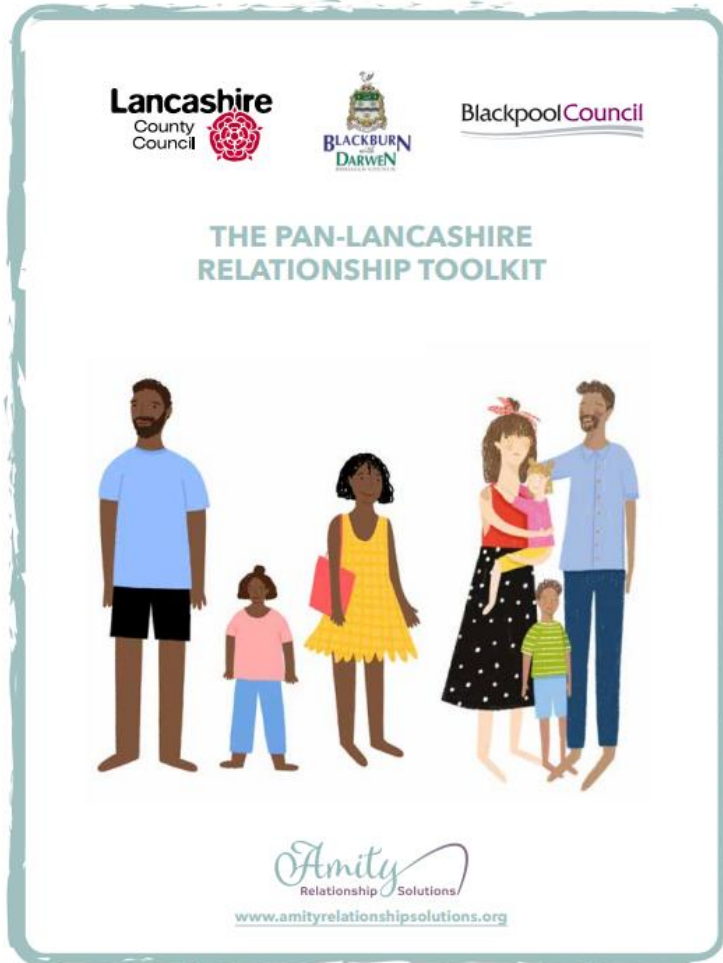
# Professional Curiosity and Courageous Conversations

- Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.
- Curious professionals will spend time engaging with families. Observations can also be important.
- Do not presume you know what is happening in the family home – ask questions and seek clarity if you are not certain.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions of families, and do so in an open way so they know that you are asking to keep the children safe, not to judge or criticise.
- Be open to the unexpected, and incorporate information that does not support your initial assumptions into your judgement of what is going on in the family.
- Changes in behaviour of children or parents may not be due to conflict – but they will be due to something – having the courageous conversation can help us understand what.

# Break Time!



# Tools and Strategies – Support for the Couple Relationship



The toolkit offers a range of tools and strategies that you can suggest parents use to understand where the conflict in their relationship may come from and what they can try to bring about positive change

What causes  
conflict IN relationships?



**The causes:**

**Pretty much anything and everything can cause conflict, especially if a couple is living with large amounts of stress.**

# Group Task:

On the next slide is an image...initially individually write down the first three things you notice about the picture...then compare notes...how were your perspectives different from each other? How do you think this relates to parental relationships?







### ***It is good practice to ask yourself:***

- Do I fully understand what this child's life is like, what they do each day?
- How do the relationships (in particular the conflict) between all family members impact on this child?
- How do they feel about their life right now?
- How does the child describe their relationship with their parents/carers/siblings.
- How would they want things to change if they could wave a magic wand?
- Do I feel confident and ready to speak to this child about parental/carer conflict?
- What is stopping me? Am I worried about opening a can of worms? What can I do about those feelings? Who can I speak to? Who will support me?
- How do I feel about sharing the things they tell me? What might stop me doing that?

### ***Key questions for children and young people about conflict***

There are some key questions you can ask that specifically relate to parental conflict. It is important that you think about the best way to approach this work and discuss with your manager a way forward based on your knowledge of the family, your role, your relationship with the family and any other factors that you might need to consider.

- What is like when x and x argue?
- How does it make you feel?
- Do x and x argue in front of you or when you are in bed?
- Do you ever struggle to sleep because of the arguments?
- Have you ever been to school and thought about what is happening at home?
- Have you ever tried to talk to x or x about how their relationship makes you feel?
- Do the arguments ever make you feel scared?
- Do you ever try to get involved?
- What do you want x and x to know about how the arguments make you feel?
- What would you like to share about your family life?
- Can you describe what would make you feel happier and/or safer?
- What do you feel needs to be different at home?

# Considering the Voice of the Child

Ref: Page 16-17





# Constructive and Destructive Conflict

## Constructive and Destructive Conflict

Many of us experience challenging times in our relationship and may struggle to communicate positively. All families have arguments, it is part of how we negotiate, make decisions, understand each other and live together. This is constructive and children learn from seeing how arguments are resolved. However, when arguments become frequent, intense and poorly resolved they become destructive, and children suffer from being exposed to them.

*Conflict in relationships  
is a reality*

  
**CONSTRUCTIVE**  
*(ie. helpful)*

OR

  
**DESTRUCTIVE**  
*(ie. unhelpful)*

Conflict in relationships  
is a reality



**CONSTRUCTIVE**  
(ie. helpful)

- ACKNOWLEDGING
- CALM
- FOCUS ON TOPIC
- NO BLAMING
- FIND A SOLUTION
- SHOW RESPECT



**DESTRUCTIVE**  
(ie. unhelpful)

OR

- SHOUTING / SWEARING
- TRYING TO WIN
- MAKE PERSONAL COMMENTS
- DON'T LISTEN
- NO RESOLUTION
- LACK FOCUS

# Constructive versus destructive conflict

**ACTIVITY:** Which of these behaviours do you recognise in yourself or your partner?

**CONSTRUCTIVE** (ie. helpful)

Acknowledging

No blaming

Acknowledging

No blaming

Calm

Find a solution

Calm

Find a solution

Focus on topic

Show respect

Focus on topic

Show respect

Ref: Page 18

# Constructive versus destructive conflict

**DESTRUCTIVE** *(i.e. unhelpful)*

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shouting / swearing    | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't listen  | <input type="checkbox"/> Shouting / swearing    | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't listen  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trying to win          | <input type="checkbox"/> No resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> Trying to win          | <input type="checkbox"/> No resolution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make personal comments | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack focus    | <input type="checkbox"/> Make personal comments | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack focus    |

# The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

*Relationship breakdown*



# Antidotes:

**Critical:** “You always talk about yourself, why are you so selfish?”

**Antidote:** I’m feeling left out of our talk tonight and I need to vent. Can we please talk about my day?”

**Contempt:** “You forgot to do the dishes again (eye roll) you are so flippin’ lazy!”

**Antidote:** “I understand that you’ve been busy lately, but could you please remember to do the dishes when I work late? I’d appreciate it.”

## Antidotes:

**Defensiveness:** “It’s not my fault that we are going to be late, it’s your fault for always getting ready at the last minute!” **Antidote:** “I don’t like being late, but you’re right. We don’t always have to leave so early. I can be a little more chilled.”

**Stonewalling:** “Look we’ve been through this loads of times, I’m tired of reminding you!” **Antidote:** “I’m sorry to interrupt you, but I’m feeling overwhelmed, and I need to take a break. Can you give me twenty minutes and then we can talk?”



# Always, sometimes, never



# What stuff is in your baggage?



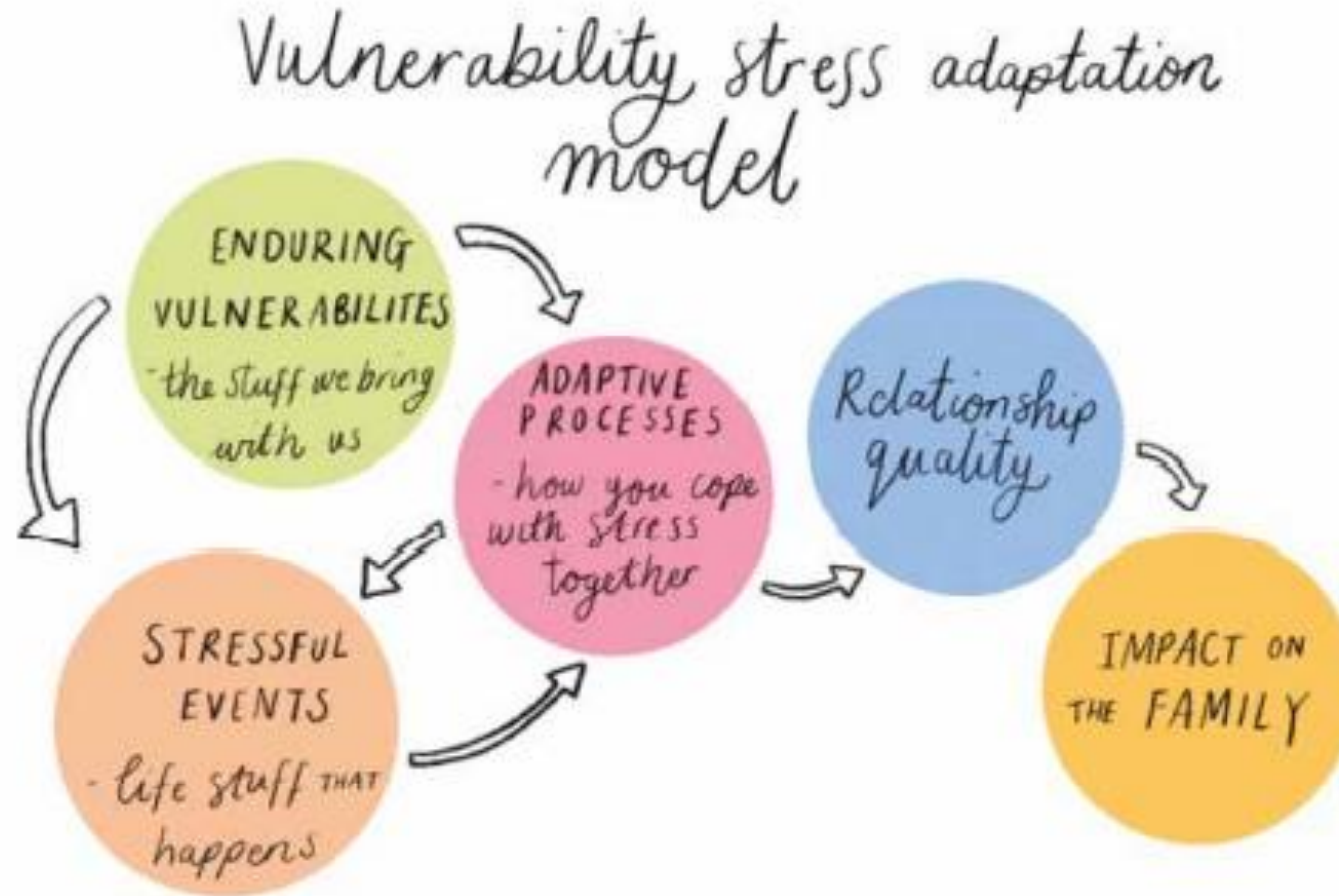
As a human, you do what you do and think what you think largely influenced by your past experiences..... the 'stuff' you bring with you.

This stuff consists of many different things like  
The culture and community you have lived in

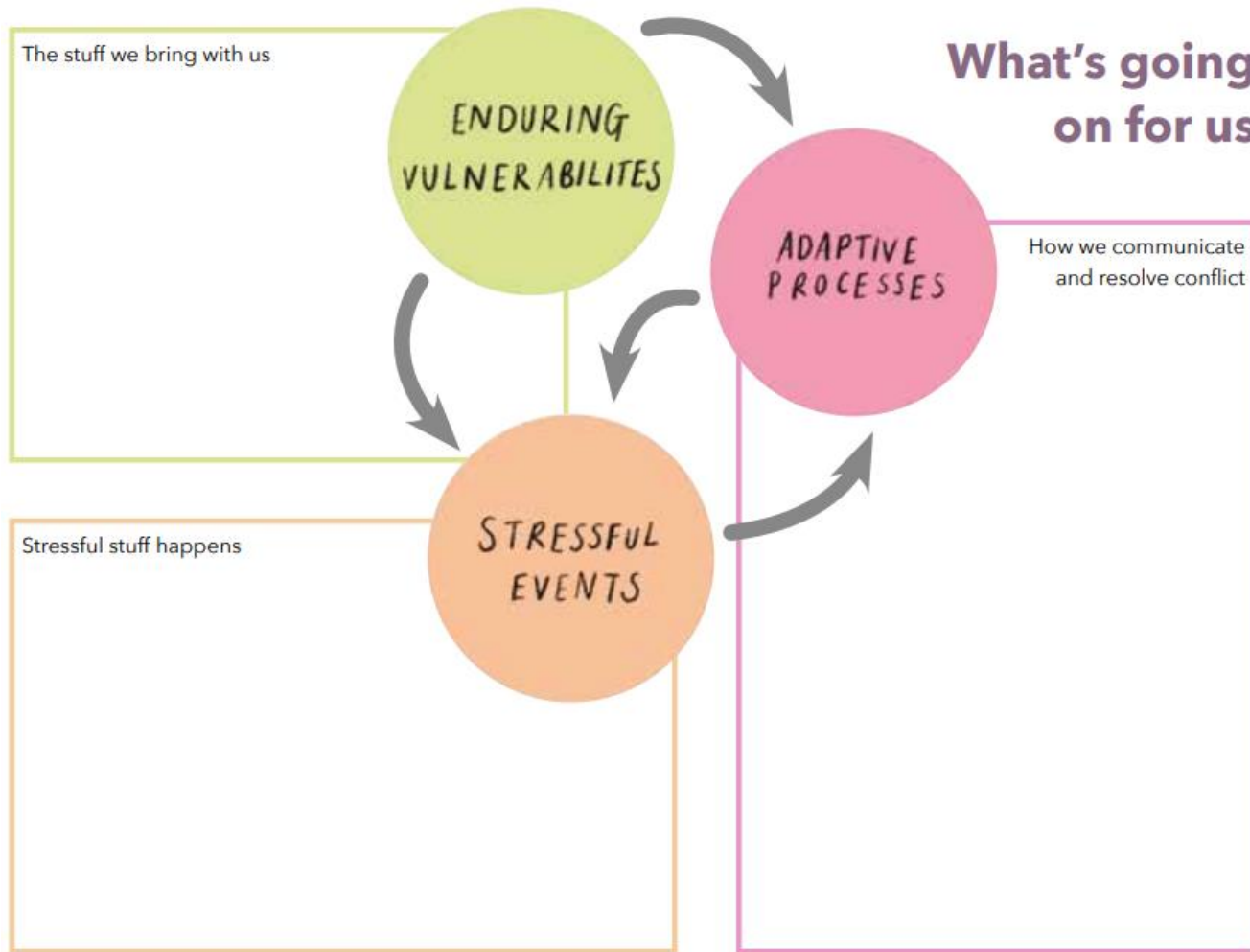
Your genetic make-up, your personality  
The socio-economic environment you have lived in

Your past relationships, romantic and family  
The way you were parented

# Vulnerability stress adaptation model (VSA)



# VSA Template



The things you bring with you into your relationship from your past experiences

The stressful events that you are dealing with

Your ability to adapt together as a couple taking into account your enduring vulnerabilities and the stress

# Roles that children can take on as a result of conflict

## *putting children IN THE middle*



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



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



When your child feels they have to be the mediator between you, keeping the peace



When you share too much info with your child and expect them to fill the emotional gap



When you ask your child to take info between you and your partner/ex

## ACTIVITY:

Children need the continuing care and support of both parents whether they are together or not.

They will worry less if both parents can agree about what is going to happen and explain why to them.

- Go through the cards separately with each parent. Enter in the circle **E (Easy)** or **H (Hard)**.
- Ask them to place each of the laminated cards in the two circles (**easy/hard**)
- For the statements placed in the '**easy**' circle ask what they feel they have done to have been successful and celebrate that
- Discuss what the barriers have been to the statements they have placed in the '**hard**' circle
- What could they do to overcome the barriers and who can they ask for help/support
- If necessary, devise an action plan together that identifies a positive way towards making changes



# What is difficult for me what is easy for me

# Easy and Hard activity cards

I have reassured our child/ren that I still love them

I understand that accepting and dealing with the separation will enable me to help our child/ren to do the same *(use this if it applies)*

I remember that accepting and dealing with the separation will enable me to better assist our children to do the same *(if it applies)*

I respect that our children have the right to love both of us - I don't make them choose

I tell our child/ren that they are not to blame and help them to discuss their feelings - as I know they often blame themselves, especially when parents fight about them or things they have done

I listen sympathetically to our child/ren's feelings and opinions without judgement

I talk with my co-parent about issues relating to our child/ren

I make sure our child/ren don't hear or see us using destructive conflict during arguments

I keep our child/ren out of our arguments with or about their other parent

I am positive about the other parent when talking to our child/ren

# Lunch-Time!





# Amity Relationship Essentials: The Toolkit

## Agenda

- Using the Toolkit- ideas for activities
- Solution Based Questioning
- Case Studies
- Final Thoughts- Child Focus
- Close and Evaluation

Sulker

**What is your style?**

Walker

**How does your style effect your partner  
and how the argument goes?**

Pusher

*Sulker*

This is a person who uses silence and withdrawal to get what they want. They often feel resentful and are trying to gain sympathy from others to get a certain outcome that suits them.

*Sulker*

Some people are capable of long periods of sulking. Often the partner of a sulker can't stand the atmosphere so will give in to the demands being made in order to restore peace.

walker

walker

Walking away from conflict is a self-preservation strategy a lot of the time. You feel overwhelmed by the conflict and are struggling to find a resolution, walking away provides the opportunity to process what is happening and hope that things calm down so a more productive conversation might follow later on.

pusher

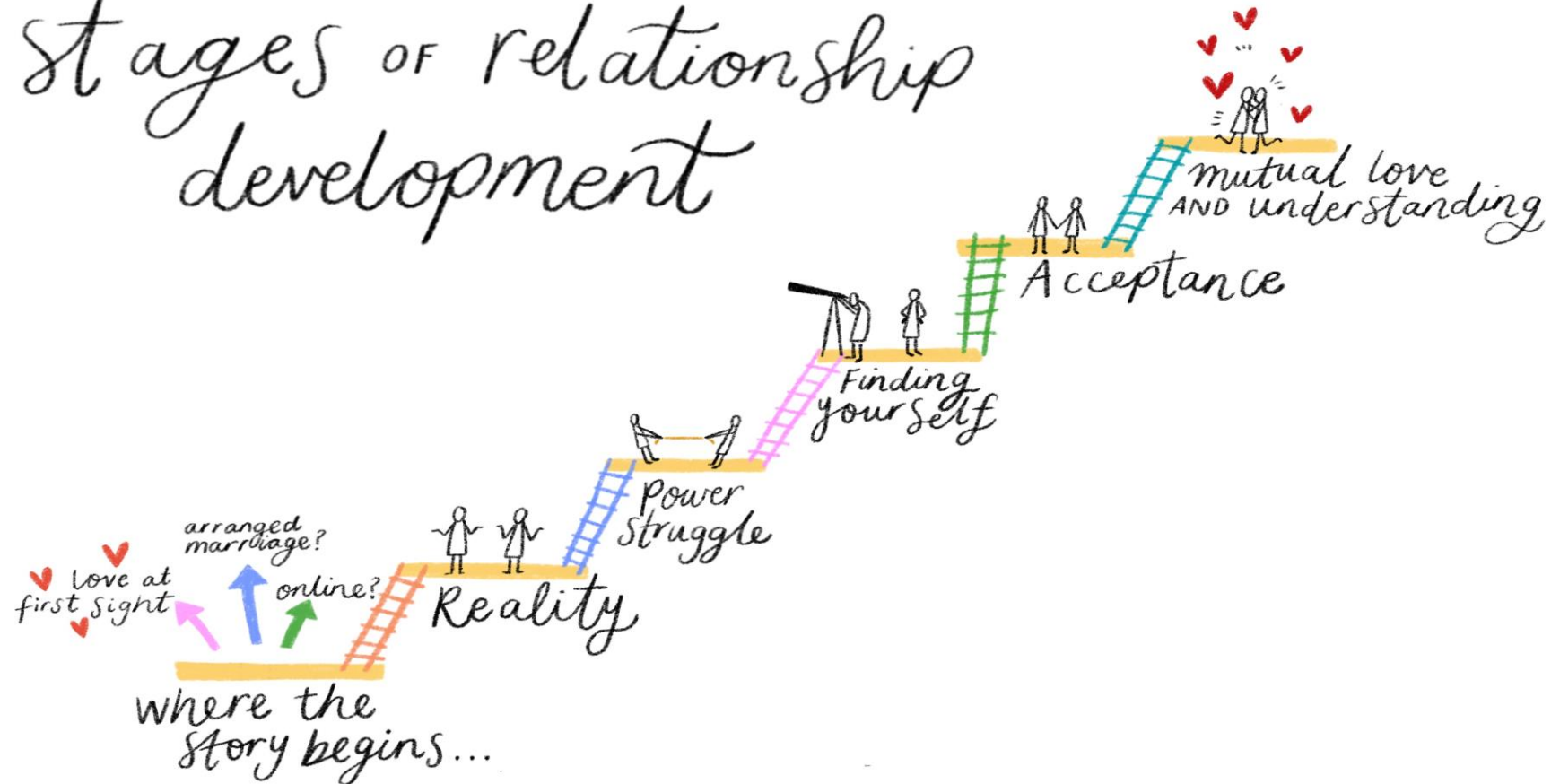
Pushing for discussion, for the other person to engage and 'get things sorted out' in the moment is a common arguing style. This behaviour is often what causes the other person to walk away.

pusher

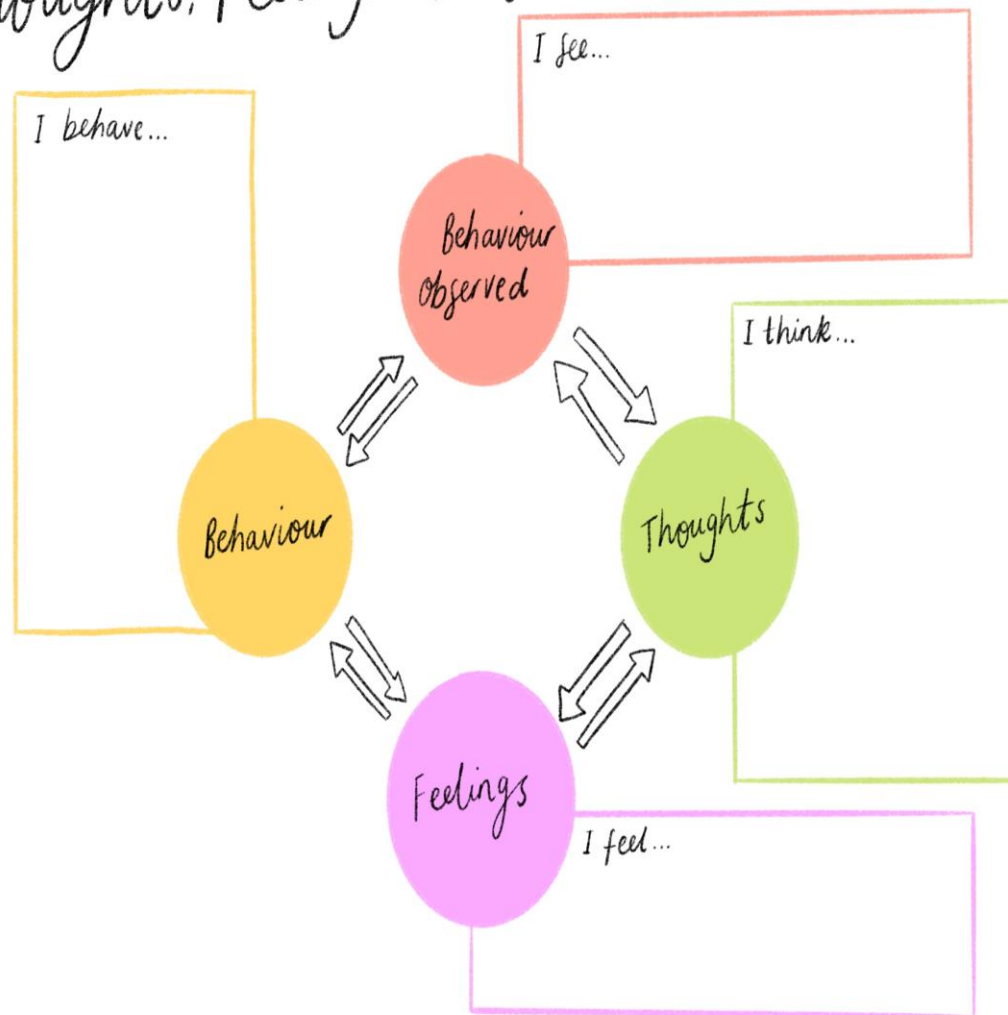
The need for discussion to be immediate, to see things through at the time that they happen feels important but that feeling may not be shared.

# How a relationship develops

## stages of relationship development



# Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour



## Simple Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Couples constantly observe each others behaviour

They have a response in their thoughts and feelings to what they see

They often make assumptions about their partners thoughts and feelings and respond based on those misunderstandings...





# The Feelings Wheel

What is behind your...

**Sad?**

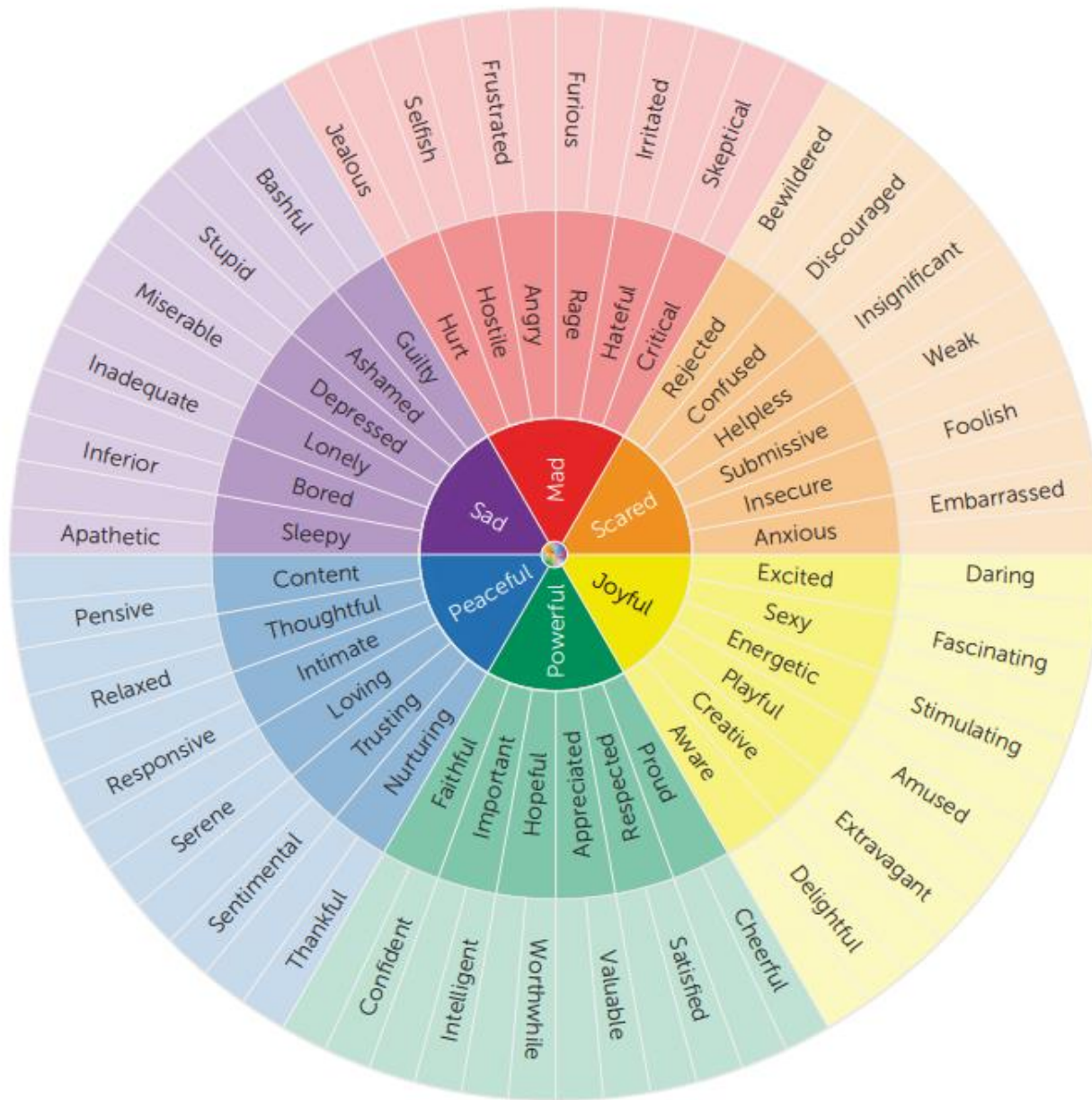
**Mad?**

**Scared?**

**Joyful?**

**Powerful?**

**Peaceful?**





# Anger Iceberg

Icebergs are large pieces of ice found floating in the open ocean. What you can see from the surface can be misleading. Most of the iceberg is hidden below the water.

This is how anger works. Often when we are angry, there are other emotions hidden under the surface.

Angry

embarrassed scared grief  
shame tricked overwhelmed  
frustrated depressed disgusted  
distrustful grumpy stressed  
attacked rejected helpless  
guilt trapped nervous anxious  
trauma annoyed exhausted  
disrespected unsure envious  
disappointed lonely offended  
uncomfortable insecure

Angry because?

Couples are often angry and it's valuable to identify what is behind that anger as that is often misunderstood if not explored...

## Relationship Scale



Some solution focused questions...

When you felt ok together, what was happening then that isn't happening now?

How have you coped together when things have been difficult in the past?

What would you partner be doing if you were feeling more loved by them?

What might get in the way of you moving towards feeling more ok?

What could you do for each other that might help you to feel more connected?

# Speak using 'I'

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>You care more about your emails than your kids</p>         | <p>You never pay me any attention, you don't fancy me anymore</p>              | <p>You spend more time on social media than you do talking to me</p> | <p>You never listen to how I feel, you don't care</p>              |
| <p>You spend too much money on yourself</p>                   | <p>You spend so much time out of the house so you don't have to be with me</p> | <p>You care more about watching TV than hanging out with me</p>      | <p>You are so untrustworthy with our money</p>                     |
| <p>You are so unreliable always late and forgetting stuff</p> | <p>You don't pull your weight with kids chores</p>                             | <p>You don't care what I want from life</p>                          | <p>You don't back me up when I'm trying to discipline the kids</p> |

# Our typical day and the trigger times/issues that cause conflict

Our typical day

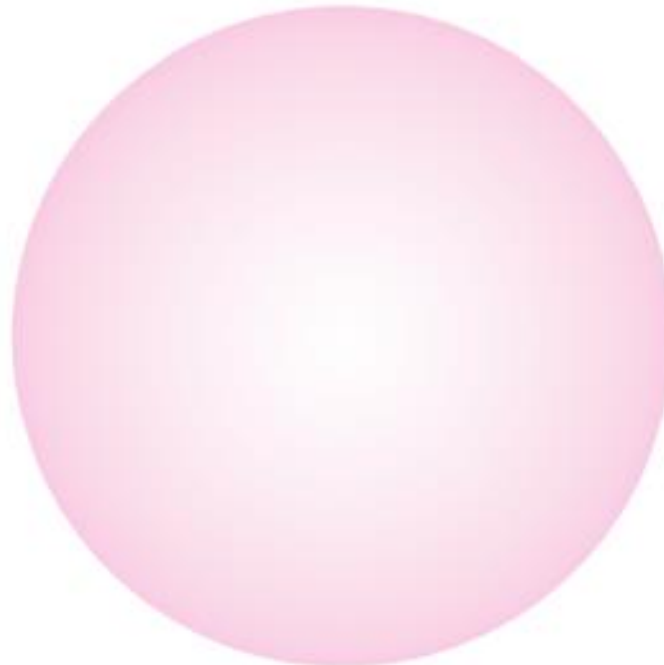
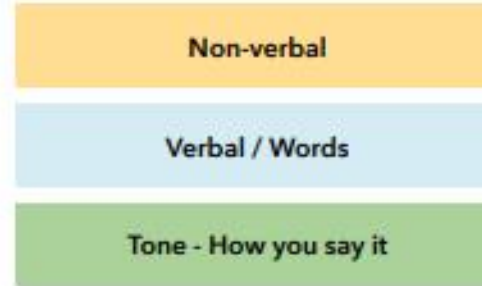
|           | What my day looks like | Triggers to conflict |
|-----------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Morning   |                        |                      |
| Afternoon |                        |                      |
| Evening   |                        |                      |
| Night     |                        |                      |

# Communication

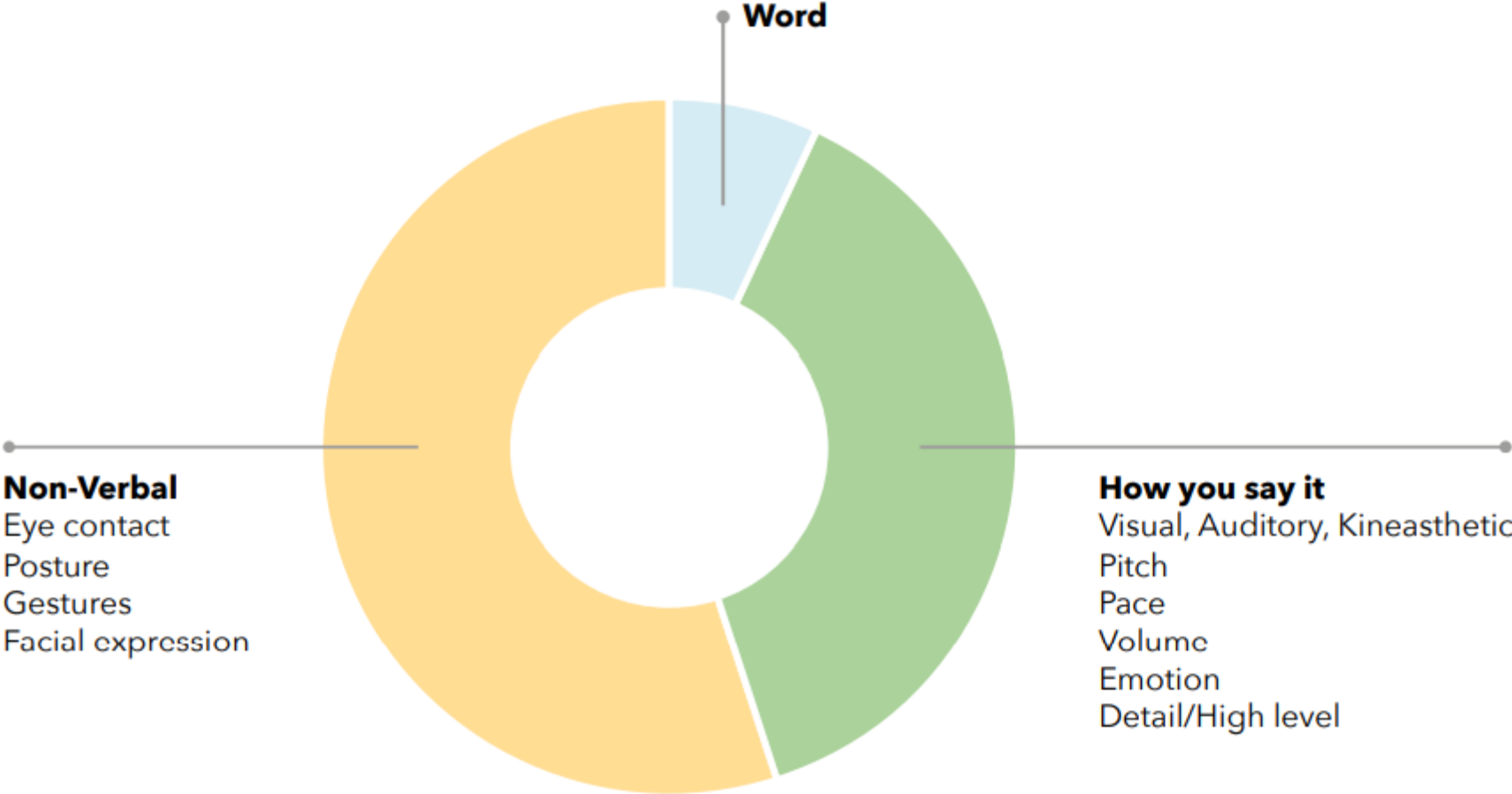
## ACTIVITY:

Communication is much more than just the spoken word, see the diagram below of the communication pie.

This can be completed with the parent/carer - Ask them how they think about each of the communication 'types' is divided using a blank circle.



# Communication





# Practitioner questions for couples

## Questions for couples

This is a list of questions that couples can ask each-other, maybe print the list out and let the couple have a copy for conversations they may want to engage in at home. This is a good habit to get into as a couple, checking in with each other. *(Adapted from [www.familylife.com](http://www.familylife.com))*

1. What could I do to help you feel more loved?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. What could I do to help you feel more respected?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. What could I do to help you feel more understood?

.....

## Solution focused practitioner questions

# Core Questions for Practitioners

These are some core questions that are worth trying to remember as they are always useful if you have a small window of opportunity to talk to a couple/person about their relationship. Think of them as a first aid kit, there when you need to respond quickly to a conflict situation.

1. If you felt like your relationship was in a better place, what would be different?
  2. What would you both need to do differently to get there?
  3. What might get in the way of you making these changes?
  4. How could you help each other to overcome these barriers?
  5. What support do you need from me?
-

# Tips for talking about relationships

Listen, really listen, don't bombard with questions.

Ask about what someone is thinking, we often ask how someone is feeling and we often know the answer before we get it. Asking about what someone is thinking tends to be more fruitful.

Quality not quantity, long conversations aren't always helpful. Focus on what is really going on rather than letting someone give you very long versions of their story.

It is not your job to fix it, but to listen and ask useful questions, that is the way you can add value.

Use open questions, summarise and feedback the thoughts and feelings you have picked up on.

You may find it helpful to remember that so much of what we communicate with someone is done via our body language, tone, pace etc. We use verbal and non-verbal communication all the time. You may find it helpful to share this with the parent you are working with as people are often surprised to find how important the non-verbal side of the way you communicate is.

# Break Time!



# Group Task: CASE STUDY

You are about to watch a clip of a scenario...



As we watch the clip think about -

- How did the video make you feel?
- What do you think the effects of conflict can have on your children?
- Parental relationships why do we care about them?
- Can you identify any of the tools in the toolkit that you could use in this situation?

See it differently

## Chloe's Family: The Haircut



As we watch the clip think about -

- How did the video make you feel?
- What do you think the effects of conflict can have on your children?
- Parental relationships why do we care about them?
- Can you identify any of the tools in the toolkit that you could use in this situation?



(screen buzzes)

**See it differently**

## Jag's Family: New Trainers



As we watch the clip think about -

- How did the video make you feel?
- What do you think the effects of conflict can have on your children?
- Parental relationships why do we care about them?
- Can you identify any of the tools in the toolkit that you could use in this situation?

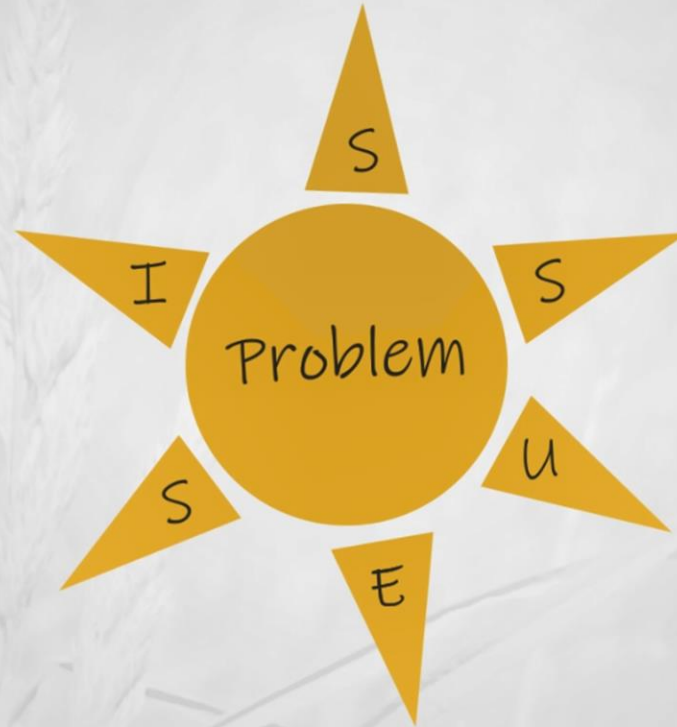




(screen buzzes)

# ...A final thought...

*Problems and issues*





# Evaluation Form and Questions

Further Sources of information

[Home - Reducing Parental Conflict - Knowledge Hub \(khub.net\)](http://khub.net)

[Reducing Parental Conflict Hub \(eif.org.uk\)](http://eif.org.uk)

Contact email: [earlyhelptraining@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:earlyhelptraining@lancashire.gov.uk)



<https://click.clickrelationships.org/home/all-issues>



<https://www.relate.org.uk>



<https://www.tavistockrelationships.org>



Ref: Page 80

## Thank-you for attending today!

# Evaluation

