

# Every Relationship Matters in Norfolk

## Practice Week.

Parental Conflict and Mental Health

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# What does the evidence tell us?

Children of all ages can be affected by destructive inter-parental conflict, with effects evidenced across infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

How parents communicate and relate to each other, is increasingly recognised as a primary influence on effective parenting practices and children's long-term mental health and future life chances.

Studies have shown that children living in households marked by high levels of inter-parental conflict are at elevated risk of negative psychological outcomes across infancy, childhood, and adolescence

# Infant Mental Health

Children as young as 6 months evidence higher physiological symptoms of distress such as elevated heart rate in response to overt, hostile exchanges between their parents when compared to exchanges between non-parental adults.

Experiments also show that 6-month old infants become more physiologically reactive to stressful situations after looking at angry faces.

Over time, elevated stress in babies can cause separation anxiety, crankiness, and problems with sleep. When there is noticeable effects of continued conflict in their presence.

The owner of Kaleidoscope Family Therapy. “They can sense things that we may not even realise, even as infants. There have been several studies that show babies can sense when their mothers are stressed.”

# Child Mental Health

Infants and children up to the age of 5 years show signs of significant distress by crying, acting out, freezing, as well as withdrawing from or attempting to intervene in the actual conflict itself

Conflict which is not resolved healthily can lead to children expressing their feelings in 'persistent aggression, which can be associated with a range of long-term negative outcomes including academic failure, substance misuse, peer victimisation, as well as elevated symptoms of depression and depressive disorder later in life.

Children who develop negative representations of the relationship between their parents (and with their parents) are more likely to develop negative expectations of other relationships, including relationships with peers .

# Adolescent Mental Health

Children between the ages of 6 and 12 years (middle childhood) and 13 and 17 years (adolescence) also show signs of emotional and behavioural distress when exposed to ongoing, acrimonious exchanges between parents

Inter-parental conflict is associated with an increase in children's internalising problems, with studies evidencing higher rates of anxiety and depression in pre- and post adolescent-aged children who witness ongoing acrimonious inter-parental conflict.

While internalising and externalising problems represent distinct profiles of problems, particularly as children progress from childhood to adolescence, recent theoretical perspectives have highlighted the link between externalising problems (e.g. antisocial behaviour) and internalising problems (e.g. depression).



# Conflict between parents is normal

## Constructive Conflict

- ✓ Try to compromise
- ✓ Demonstrate Warmth
- ✓ Use humour and negotiation
- ✓ Resolve their differences
- ✓ Agree to differ
- ✓ Not trying to put the other person down
- ✓ Increased understanding

## Destructive Conflict

- × Intense Arguments
- × Hostile verbal exchanges
- × The 'silent treatment'
- × The need to win
- × Personal Attacks
- × Arguments that are about or involve the children



# How Every Relationship Matters in Norfolk is supporting Mental Health

- One Plus One and Triple P specialist intervention programmes are being offered to parents.
- Co-production of resources with parents from Family Voice Norfolk.
- Every Relationship Matters in Norfolk has a platform on Just One Norfolk in supporting families to access self-help resources.
- Co-production of resources to support mental health with children and young people from the Youth Advisory Board.
- Professional toolkit available to front-line working practitioners to access resources to support the de-escalation of parental conflict.
- Partnerships and agencies working together to improve better outcomes for early intervention of parental conflict.



# Support for Mental Health

- **Children's Guide**
- **Anxiety work booklet**
- **Mindfulness for Children and Young People**
- **Stress Bucket**
- **What is a healthy relationship**
- **My feelings workbook**
- **Support Services**

# What Young People have to say...

- *“When banter and bickering has gone too far”*
- *“TV show arguments makes it normalised, and parents watching it think it's okay”*
- *“It is used to be just arguments between Mum and Dad. After some time, it turned into fighting”*
- *“Mum and dad spilt up because my mum would cheat on my dad. They would argue a lot over this. He would blame it on us”*
- *“I'm lucky because my parents know how to communicate but I have so many friends whose parents argue. And I know they feel upset about it”*

# Just One Norfolk



# Norfolk Multi-agency Practice Week



Feedback can be provided through the QR code on the left or through the following link which can be shared in the chat:

<https://forms.office.com/e/EM5kEwrFLU>



# Thank you for attending our workshop.



## Any questions?