**Mediation to reduce parental conflict : one-minute guide**

**What is ‘Parental Conflict’ and why is it harmful?**

Some conflict between parents can be expected, and to an extent it is healthy for children to see their parents able to argue and to resolve disagreements. Where conflict is frequent, intense, and poorly resolved – or not resolved – this can lead to long term harm for children. The home environment no longer feels like a safe place for them or at best, it is a place where there isn’t a lot of fun. When parents have separated, parental conflicts may persist and leave children feeling upset, torn, or confused.

**What is the difference between harmful parental conflict and domestic abuse?**

The two are very different (although they can look similar), and it is important that we are able to identify which is happening as how we respond will differ. The Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme is aimed at conflict below the threshold of domestic abuse. This means there is no violence and no significant power imbalance between the couple, and no coercive control being exerted by one parent over the other.

If you are unsure whether to refer for mediation or for domestic abuse services, consider the following:

**Questions to consider if you are worried about potential domestic abuse:**

Is one parent afraid of the other?

Is there an imbalance of power?

Is one parent using power to restrict the other’s relationship with family and friends?

Or their ability to work and be financially independent?

Is one parent using threatening behaviour?

Does one parent constantly contact and harass the other?

CONSIDER REFERRAL TO OTHER SERVICES

**What might harmful parental conflict look like?**

Stuck arguments that recur frequently about the same topic e.g. finances, how time is spent, how domestic tasks are split etc.

Limited ability by either parent to compromise

Conflict over contact arrangements for children

Parents having very different approaches to conflict meaning they find it hard to resolve issues

CONSIDER REFERRAL FOR MEDIATION

* Children may be drawn into managing conflict

**What is ‘Mediation’ ?**

Mediation is a process where a trained, independent, neutral person – the mediator – works with 2 parties to help them resolve difficulties and make forward-looking plans. This is a structured, time-limited piece of work.

**How** **does it work?**

When a referral is received, the Mediation team will contact the parties involved to arrange a suitable time for the mediation sessions to take place. The mediator will meet with each parent / carer separately, and then together. The aim is to help the parents develop an agreement and a plan that they are both ok with.

**Can we insist that parents do this if we think children are being harmed?**

No. Mediation is an entirely voluntary process. Both parents / carers must agree, and either can withdraw during the process.

**How do I refer**

Please discuss the possibility of mediation with parents / carers before making the referral. It will be ideal if both have consented, but if not, the Mediation team will contact the other parent / carer to ask if they are willing to take part. There is a simple referral form.

If you are unsure whether to refer, please In the first instance, please contact the Family Group Conference service to discuss your possible referral: Familygroup.conference@towerhamlets.gov.uk

**Will I be told what has happened?**

The only outcome of the mediation is the agreement and plan that comes from the Mediation session. The parents / carers may choose to share this with you.

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Domestic Abuse – higher risk

* There is an imbalance of power with one parent using coerce and control against the other, the non-abusing parent is likely fearful of their partner/ex-partner and feels they have limited ‘space for action and decision’.
* The children are under a child protection plan or in some cases a CIN plan
* The victim’s case is at MARAC
* May include some or all of the following: Physical violence leading to injuries, intimidation or threats, emotional abuse (especially that which causes or exacerbates mental health problems), sexual abuse, financial abuse or pervasive harassment.
* Physical violence could include pushing, slapping,
* Children experience this abuse, or the harm caused to a parent who’s been abused. This will be frightening, worrying and is likely to cause significant harm.



Harmful Parental Conflict

* Conflict is frequent and intense and is often left poorly resolved or unresolved.
* There is a lack of open communication and topics of conflict are frequently revisited.
* There is no physical violence and no significant power imbalance between the parents and/or neither parent’s ‘space for action & decision’ is limited due to the other abusing the imbalance of power between them.
* Children may be caught in the middle of the conflict and be impacted by their frequent exposure to intense conflict, but this is not likely to lead to significant harm.

Domestic Abuse – Lower risk

* There is an imbalance of power with one parent using coerce and control against the other, the non-abusing parent is likely fearful of their partner/ex-partner but still has considerable ‘space for action and decision’.
* The children are *not* under a child protection plan though in some cases they may be under a CIN plan or within Early Help
* The victim’s case is *not* at MARAC
* May include some or all of the following: Physical violence *not* leading to injuries & commensurate with pushing, slapping, holding (not by throat), intimidation or threats (*not* instilling fear of severe harm). emotional abuse (that does *not* cause or exacerbate mental health problems), sexual abuse (*not* sexual force or pervasive sexual pressure), financial abuse, occasional harassment (not pervasive)
* Children experience this abuse, or the harm caused to a parent who’s been abused. This will be worrying and upsetting but is not likely to cause significant harm.
* Perpetrators are 100% responsible for their abuse – irrespective of whether victims self-blame or have contributed to conflict escalation and risk.

Healthy Conflict Management

* Conflict is approached, managed, and moved on from respectfully, with each party being able to consider both their own and the other’s perspective.
* There is an equal power balance in the relationship and/or neither is abusing their power.
* Children witness and learn respectful conflict resolution which is balanced and approached within emotional control.