

# Parental Relationships Spectrum\*

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

INTER-COUPLE/PARENTAL CONFLICT

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/ABUSE

Respectful, equal, cooperative, happy

Mostly respectful, equal, cooperative (but experiencing difficulties)

Conflictual, non-communicative, non-violent

Situational couple conflict, abuse, violence both ways

Controlling/abusive behaviour

Coercive control and physical harm, fear of violence/death

**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 any professional; 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**

Consider early help assessment and referral to local relationship 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**

Early help assessment and consultation with **child & family hub**; contact **Compass** for advice/access to domestic abuse services

**SITUATION**

Clearer 'victim' and clearer 'abuser'

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

**ACTION**

Referral to **child & family hub**; refer and/or support referral to **Compass**

**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 **child & family hub** as a priority; refer and/or support referral to **Compass**

The Essex Children and Families Effective Support Windscreen

**UNIVERSAL**

Personalised Universal Services

LEVEL 1

**ADDITIONAL**

Additional needs met by universal and targeted services working together. Shared Family Assessment not required but can be used

LEVEL 2

**INTENSIVE**

Multi-agency approach required using Shared Family Assessment and Lead Professional or Family team response

LEVEL 3

**SPECIALIST**

Specialist and high level intervention often involving statutory process

LEVEL 4

# Parental Relationships Spectrum\*



In Essex we work honestly and openly with families, discussing any concerns with them and ensuring they are involved in decision making – **Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex Guidance**. 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. 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? How comfortable do you feel about expressing your own views and opinions? 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? 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.

More information and guidance on distinguishing between domestic abuse and harmful conflict can be found at <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/professionals/ciaf/resources-for-assessing-harmful-conflict/>

\*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)