

IMPROVING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHILDREN

Parenting together or apart



Familyhub
TORBAY

Early Help
Torbay



STANDING TALL

The aim of this toolkit is to help improve parental relationships whether people are parenting together or separated to help improve the lives of children.

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INTRODUCTION

Hello, we are a partnership between Early Help & Standing Tall, Torbay

We have created this toolkit in partnership with Torbay Early Help and Standing Tall because we know how difficult it can be to reach out and ask for support.

The focus of this Toolkit is on family relationships and reducing the impact of harmful adult conflict in families. We aim to encouraging healthy co-parenting, sharing best practice, resources and access to support for families in Torbay. The information shared is from other organisations with links for you to explore further.



STANDING TALL



IMPORTANT NOTE This toolkit is not designed for parents and carers where there is or has been domestic abuse in the relationship. **If you believe that you have experienced domestic abuse, please refer to pages 4 & 20** of this toolkit and contact Standing Tall for advice and support.

What is the difference between conflict and domestic abuse?

Conflict

Conflict is when two individuals disagree which may cause heated arguments, lead to slamming doors or 'the silent treatment' but there is no power imbalance in the relationship and neither person is fearful of the other.

'The Torbay Traffic Light Relationship Distress Tool is a colour coded guide to help parents/ carers and people who support families, to tell the difference between 'conflict' and domestic abuse and recognise behaviours in children which may indicate they are being negatively affected by adult conflict.

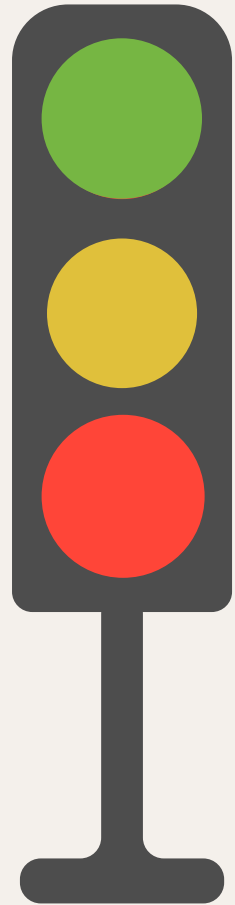
Talk to your support worker or visit Support For Families

<https://torbayfamilyhub.org.uk/topic-category/support-for-families/>

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse can be experienced by anyone and it refers to physical, psychological, emotional or sexual abuse, including coercively controlling behaviour, this normally refers to destructive patterns of behaviour, where there is a power imbalance in the relationship and one person is fearful of the other.

If you are not sure if you are experiencing domestic abuse? The Standing Tall Partnership can be contacted by calling The Torbay Community Helpline on 01803 446022 or follow this link to our website [here](#) and access to the Self Assessment Toolkit. Please also see more ways to access support on page 20.



Is conflict always bad?

·Conflict is a normal part of most relationships; it can be constructive as it allows people to air grievances or opinions and find ways to resolve issues that are causing unhappiness or frustration. Children can learn important skills by watching adults manage conflict in a constructive way. ·Conflict becomes destructive, and emotionally harmful to children when it is '**Frequent, Intense and Poorly Resolved**'.

·Children living in a household where there are high levels of conflict are known to suffer more mental and physical ill health. They are less likely to reach their potential at school, they are often less resilient and more likely to get in trouble with the police and misuse drugs and alcohol as teenagers. They are also more likely to experience problems in their own relationships as children and when they reach adulthood.

·Whatever the age of your child, by addressing adult conflict and putting your child's needs first, you will greatly improve their life chances. There are some helpful relationship tools on this website <http://gottman.com>

Behaviours that Can Lead to Relationship Breakdown

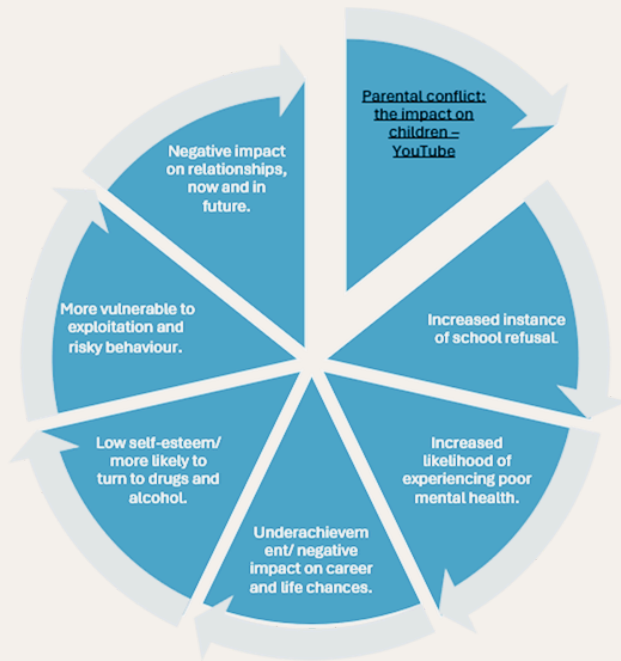


The Impact of Parent/Carer Conflict on Children

Not all children experience adult conflict in the same way, but here are some situations and possible effects that conflict can have on children.

- Conflict often happens at points of transition, ie the birth of a new baby, a change of job, bereavement or through stresses such as debt, unemployment or illness.
- When parents/ carers argue, young children can show distress by crying, becoming withdrawn or behaving aggressively.
- Children can show physical symptoms such as tummy aches, headaches or start bed-wetting, they can struggle at school and may suffer from lack of sleep and become clingy and anxious.
- Older children will be more likely to notice destructive adult behaviours such as criticism, eye rolling and the silent treatment, which creates a hostile atmosphere.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FXLgmGskgs>



A supportive network of family and friends can help reduce the negative impact of conflict on children and seeking support as early as possible, before it escalates, is the most effective way of restoring healthy relationships.

Here are some video links to see how conflict can be managed more positively.



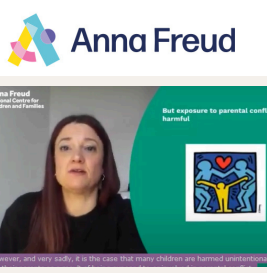
Relationships Matter

Happy family relationships make us all feel good and help our children feel secure and loved. Often as a parent or carer, we are trying to juggle lots of things, and keep our own relationships as positive as can be. Sometimes all relationships can become difficult, and this may impact everyone. Relationships Matter has been created to provide advice, tips, and support to help keep our relationships positive and to support parents and carers.

See It Differently

When we argue with our partner or ex-partner, we can get caught up in the heat of the moment. At times like these, it's difficult to find a way forward.

We want to help you see things differently, and do things differently.



Conflict and Separation

All parents and carers sometimes argue with one another, but sometimes, conflict between parents or carers can increase to a level that is not healthy for the family. This can happen for lots of reasons. For example, the Covid-19 lockdown, where families share the same space under increased stress and uncertainty about the future, with reduced support from friends and extended families, may increase arguments.

Co-parenting after a separation or divorce

Research tells us that it is not parental separation itself which harms children the most; whether together or apart, on-going, high parental conflict causes children emotional distress and can impact negatively on their life chances.

Co-parenting is when two (or more) people are parenting a child but not as one unit. If you're co-parenting after a separation or divorce, or perhaps sharing the care of your child with a family member, here are some tips on how to help your child.

Things you can try:

Acknowledge your feelings about the separation and find ways to look after yourself. This is really important, as it will help you manage your emotions and allow you to focus on your child.

- Establish a shared understanding of what co-parenting means.
- If you're struggling to agree on how you'll co-parent, try starting with a list of what your child can expect from you both.
- Work as a team with your co-parent to manage the details of parenting decisions, write them down to avoid misunderstandings.
- Try to set ground rules in advance to avoid conflict later. For example, you will need to agree on when and where your children will spend time with you both and how a parent living apart keeps in touch in between these times.



Recognising Roles Children Can Be Made To Play In Parental Conflict.

The Spy – Being expected to answer questions about the co-parent. Explicitly, 'How many bedrooms does mums new house have?' Implicitly complaining about the lack of financial support from the co-parent so that the children feel the need to find out more and report back.



The Judge – By sharing issues between adults with the children, they are brought into the conflict and feel expected to decide if behaviour is right or wrong. Again, this can be explicit or implicit.

The Mediator – Older children can feel the need to mediate between adults. They may try to prevent or avoid situations which will cause conflict or offer a more positive interpretation of a parents behaviour to the other. These children will often blame themselves and take responsibility for the adult conflict.



The Carer – When adults share their emotional distress with children, the child may feel the need to step in and support or care for that adult. Roles can be reversed placing a heavy responsibility on the child who may say or do things to please a parent when it might not be what they really think or want.

The messenger – It is very common for co-parents to feel that there is no harm in children passing on verbal or written messages between them. But, a child in this position may feel overburdened in several ways. Firstly, they are being drawn into adult issues. Secondly, they have to remember to pass on the message and lastly, they may experience the negative reaction from the parent receiving the message.



Why Is It Important To Improve Family Relationships For Children?

It's not just about a parent's relationship with a child. Putting your child's needs first, means recognising the importance to their wellbeing of both parents/carers having an ongoing relationship with them as long as it is safe to do so.



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. This provision emphasizes the importance of family unity and the well-being of children.

Here are some Top Tips for Separating Parents from children and young people on The Family Justice Young Peoples Board. [\(link\)](#)

1.	Remember I have the right to see both of my parents as long as it is safe for me.
2.	I can have a relationship with the partner of my other parent without this changing my love for you.
3.	Try to have good communication with my other parent because it will help me. Speak to them nicely.
4.	Keep my other parent updated about my needs and what is happening for me. I might need their help too.
5.	Don't say bad things about my other parent, especially if I can hear. Remember I can often overhear your conversations or see your social media comments.
6.	Remember it is ok for me to love and have a relationship with my other parent.
7.	Don't make me feel guilty about spending time with my other parent.
8.	Don't make permanent decisions about my life based on how you feel at the moment. Think about how I feel now and how I might feel in the future. My wishes might change.
9.	Be open to change, be flexible and compromise when agreeing arrangements for me.
10.	Its ok with me if my parents don't do things exactly the same. You are both different and that's alright with me.
11.	Don't be possessive over me and the things that belong to me. Make it easy for me to take the things I need when I spend time with my other parent, such as schoolwork, PE kits, clothes, books, games, phone etc. Let me choose what I want to take with me.
12.	Keep me informed about any changes to my arrangements.

What can I do to improve our co-parenting relationship if we have already separated and live apart?

13.	Try not to feel hurt if I choose to spend time with my friends instead of seeing you. I am growing up!
14.	Remember that important dates (birthdays, celebrations, parents evening, sports day etc) are special to you, me and my other parent. I may want to share my time on those dates with each of you.
15.	Work out between you and my other parent who is responsible for the extra things I need, such as new school shoes and uniform, school trips, dinner money and the cost of my hobbies or after school activities. I don't want to be involved in this.
16.	Remember that I don't expect you or my other parent to be perfect, so I don't want you to expect my other parent to be perfect either. Accept mistakes and move on.
17.	Make sure I am not left out of key family events. Please compromise with my other parent so I can join in.
18.	Please don't stop me having contact with extended family members who are important to me. Ask me how I feel about them. Don't assume my feelings are the same as yours.
19.	Don't use me as a messenger between you and my other parent.
20.	Don't use my relationship with my other parent against me, or them.
21.	Don't ask me to lie to my other parent or other family members.
22.	Don't ask me to lie to professionals, or to say what you want me to say.
23.	Don't make me scared to say what I think about my arrangements for fear of being told off or treated badly by you if you don't agree.
24.	Remember that I might want something different to my brother or sister.
25.	Don't worry about how others see you or what they think. I am what matters.

Good Communication is essential:

At first, it can be difficult to communicate with an ex partner or carer who you have fallen out with, but you need to keep the focus on the children and be civil to each other.

If you find it difficult to speak without getting into an argument, you can use a contact book but only relay information about the children and avoid asking the children to pass on messages.

Co-parenting Apps are a good tool to help you manage this vital part of co-parenting..

Appclose – is a free App that can be downloaded. (others are available but often at a small cost).

Our Family Wizard – is free to families receiving benefits, application forms can be requested from the Torbay Family Hubs.

Co-Parenting Apps help separated parents communicate effectively about their children.

<https://separ8.co.uk/tips-advice/co-parenting-apps-which-one-to-choose/>

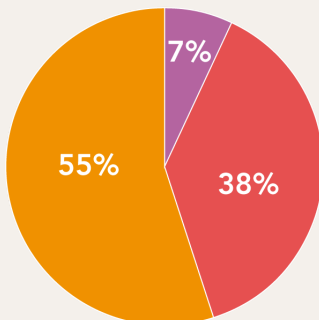


Communication is not just words

7% spoken words

38% voice, tone

55% body language



How to Create a Parenting Plan



Click on the images to access the resources.

A parenting plan is a written agreement between parents and carers to support a co-parenting approach that covers the practical issues for your children. We are sharing some great resources to help you create a parenting plan here.



Separated Families

Successful negotiations – strategies for making agreements. Reaching agreements after divorce or separation isn't always easy. Parents who are separating are often dealing with difficult emotions and these can get in the way of successful negotiations. It can be difficult to know where to start or even be sure whether it will be possible to reach an agreement.

<https://www.separatedfamilies.info/home/parenting-apart/negotiations/>

Cafcass

A Parenting Plan can help because it shows clearly what arrangements and actions you have agreed to meet the needs of your child. Agreeing a plan can avoid you having to go to court to reach such an agreement or have arrangements ordered by the court. Agreeing a plan shows your child that you are putting them first and will always act in their best interests.

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/parent-carer-or-family-member/my-family-involved-private-law-proceedings/help-planning-together-children>



Gingerbread

There are many different ways children can stay in contact with the parent they're not living with after a separation or divorce. Every family is different. Making arrangements for your children to spend time with their other parent can be difficult and emotionally charged, and there are lots of things to think about. This page covers the main things to consider when it comes to how, when and where your child sees their other parent.

<https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/find-information/managing-separation/child-contact-arrangements/>

Free Programmes Available

These programmes in Torbay and online are to help reduce conflict and co-parent more positively:

Click on the images for access to resources.



Dad.info

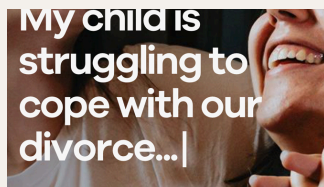
Free access to an 11 module programme about the best way to manage co-parenting for the children. (anyone can access this).

- The New Dad Survival Guide
- One to One Time With Children – The Benefits
- How To Help Children With Anxiety
- How To Avoid Parental Conflict
- 6 Ways To Change Your Life and more

Strengthening Families

This is an approved national programme, for parents together and apart, which are available free until December 2024, to improve communication and co-parenting relationships. Parents do home learning and join on-line discussion groups with a facilitator.

Please click on the link above for more information.



Relate

Relate offer free relationship support to current and ex-service families. Available to all if self-funded.

What's Your Problem?

The Torbay EPIC Project and Restore Relationships Programme. The EPIC project is a whole family approach which offers support to all members of the family including children. This can include the Restore Relationships programme as a stand-alone offer to improve relationships and reduce conflict in adult relationships. For more information contact 01803 524044 or text 07710 119 457.



Free Programmes Available

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Click on the images for access to resources.



[Family Hub Torbay](#)



Family Hubs are a new way of bringing together all the support a family may need and provides a welcoming space and a 'front door' for families from pregnancy through to young people turning 19 (or 25 if they experience SEND) There is a lot of articles and helpful information on the website, including Action For Children and wider Early Help Services.

What is a family group conference?

A family group conference (FGC) is an opportunity for you and your support network (can be family and/or friends, important people in your lives) to come together to make a plan for your children. It can help to strengthen the support you and your children have around you and ensure that you all have a say in what that looks like.

It is a voluntary process that is supported by an independent coordinator who helps you and your support network prepare for the meeting. They will make all the arrangements with you and ensure that the right people attend including any professionals you feel are key.

If you be happy for someone from the FGC Team to give you a call to discuss this offer in more detail, please contact the FGC team.

[Torbay Family Group Conference Service](#)

[Family Hub – Support For Families](#)

Mediation Services

Make well-informed decisions, reduce conflict and avoid court proceedings following divorce.



[Citizens Advice Torbay](#)

Citizens Advice Torbay provides a free, impartial and confidential service to everyone.



The EPIC Project

The new Standing
Tall initiative



STANDING TALL

The Epic Project has been created to offer a different, holistic approach to supporting families in Torbay

- ✔ We know that relationships can sometimes be difficult.
- ✔ We know there may be barriers for men who want support with their relationships.
- ✔ We know how important it is to involve children in family support.

We can arrange:

- ✔ Free, friendly tailored support for each family
- ✔ Relationship Courses
- ✔ Emotional Support
- ✔ Counselling
- ✔ Family Interventions
- ✔ Help with Housing
- ✔ Help with Benefits
- ✔ Access to free legal advice
- ✔ Recovery Courses
- ✔ Fun, family activities



To access EPIC free and friendly whole family support please call our helpline on **01803 446 022** or scan the QR code.

Familyhub
TORBAY

Family Court; Last Resort?

Thinking about going to Court can feel intimidating, but sometimes it is the right thing to do, particularly where there has been domestic abuse or there are other safeguarding concerns.

“ In the financial year ending 2021 it is estimated that there were 2.3 million separated families in Great Britain and 3.6 million children in those separated families. ”

Most carers/parents do not need to go Court. In 2022/ 2023 [Cafcass](#) (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) worked with 97,098 children in private law proceedings which is only a small percentage of children who experience their parents' separation. Cafcass represents the interest of children and young people in the family court. They independently advise the family courts about what is safe for children and in their best interests.

Family Courts are different from Criminal Courts. Decisions are based on the best interest of the child which is derived from the Welfare Checklist which is at the centre of the Children Act 1989. The Welfare Checklist - <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/the-welfare-checklist/>

Your local Family Court

Torquay and Newton Abbot County and Family Court.

Find a Court or Tribunal

GOV.UK (find-court-tribunal.service.gov.uk)

Click on the link to find contact details.



How much does it cost to go to Court?

The costs associated with private law proceedings can vary depending on several factors. Here are some key points to consider.

- Court proceedings can be lengthy and very stressful both for adults and children.
- By going to Court unless you can sort out the child arrangements by agreement, other people will make the decisions for your children.
- Have you tried mediation? The Court will expect you to do this after you've made your application (unless there are safeguarding concerns).
- Can you afford a solicitor or are you eligible for legal aid? Can you represent your-self and be a Litigant in Person (LIP)?
- For further information and support please see links below and on pg19.

Go to Advice Now <https://www.advicenow.org.uk/guides/representing-yourself-family-court-film>

Useful links to help you navigate through the Court process



Guide for separated parents: children and the family courts
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-for-separated-parents-children-and-the-family-courts-cb7>



Official Guide to going through the Family Court.
Guide for separated parents: [children and the family courts \(CB7\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-for-separated-parents-children-and-the-family-courts-cb7)



Useful information from Cafcass (Children and Family, Advisory and Support Service) going through Family Court Proceedings or considering separation and divorce
<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/parent-carer-or-family-member>



What to expect when you arrive at Court
What to expect coming to a court or tribunal
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-to-expect-coming-to-a-court-or-tribunal>



CB1 – Making an application – Children and the family courts.
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fff01268fa8f563fd0c474a/cb1-eng.pdf>



Flowchart for child arrangements cases – Family Court Information
<https://www.familycourtinfo.org.uk/i-need/how-court-works/flowchart-for-child-arrangements-cases/>



My family is involved in private law proceedings | Cafcass
<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/parent-carer-or-family-member/my-family-involved-private-law-proceedings>



[Children's Experience of Private Law PDF download](#)



Domestic Abuse Support

These organisations can help all people experiencing abuse:
If you are in danger, or in the event of an emergency always dial 999.

Standing Tall Torbay
Helpline 01803 446022

Torbay Domestic Abuse Service (TDAS)
Tel: 0800 916 1471

Devon Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Services
01392 204174/support@devonrapecrisis.org.uk

National Stalking & Harassment Helpline
08088020300/<https://.suzylamplugh.org/>

24 Hour Domestic Abuse Helpline
0808 2000 247
www.womensaid.org.uk

Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centres
The Devon and Cornwall Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) provides safety, support, forensic medical facilities and assessments, sexual health advice and counselling to women, men, young people and children.
National Freephone helpline: 0808 802 9999 (12 noon–2:30pm and 7pm–9.30pm daily).
Website: www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Refuge
Refuge is a charity that offers help and advice to women and young girls who are in abusive relationships.
24-hour national helpline: 0808 2000 247

Respect
Respect is a charity which runs support services and programmes for those who abuse in relationships, including young men and women.
Phoneline: 0808 802 4040 (Freephone), Monday to Friday 9am–5pm
Email: info@respectphoneline.org.uk














Domestic Abuse Self Assessment
whatsyourproblem.org.uk/standing-tall-partnership

Recovery After an Abusive Relationship
Accessing face to face courses, eCourses and workbooks to empower you to rebuild your life.
Email: info@morepositiveme.co.uk website: morepositiveme.co.uk



Appendix

Other Links to useful information

-  Torbay Family Hubs: offering support for families and children. Home [Family Hub \(torbayfamilyhub.org.uk\)](http://torbayfamilyhub.org.uk)
-  Parental conflict toolkit raceequalityfoundation.org.uk
-  Home - For Baby's Sake for new parents. [Home - For Baby's Sake \(forbabysake.org.uk\)](http://forbabysake.org.uk)
-  Parental conflict: the impact on children and how local authorities can help on Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/216676343>
-  Listening to your child's voice after separation - Cafcass [Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service](http://ChildrenandFamilyCourtAdvisoryandSupportService.org.uk)
-  Dr Gottman what makes marriage work [Making Marriage Work | Dr. John Gottman - YouTube](http://MakingMarriageWork.com)
-  Parental conflict [Barnardo's Family Space \(barnardos.org.uk\)](http://Barnardos.org.uk)
-  Conflict - Family Hub resources and support to reduce parent/ carer conflict. [conflict - Family Hub \(torbayfamilyhub.org.uk\)](http://conflict-FamilyHub.org.uk)
-  Child contact arrangements | Gingerbread <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/find-information/managing-separation/child-contact-arrangements/>
-  Guide for separated parents: children and the family courts <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-for-separated-parents-children-and-the-family-courts-cb7/guide-for-separated-parents-children-and-the-family-courts-cb7>
-  Parents should be referred to Cafcass website for a parenting plan cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/resources-parents-carers
-  Go to Advice Now <https://www.advicenow.org.uk/guides/representing-yourself-family-court-film>
-  Families Need Fathers Home [Families Need Fathers | Because Both Parents Matter \(fnf.org.uk\)](http://FamiliesNeedFathers.org.uk)

Standing Tall



STANDING TALL

“Everyone has the right to live in a safe environment, free from fear and harm. Our vision is to stop domestic abuse and sexual violence for all people, families and communities.”

We are proud to be launching our Whole Family service, supporting every member of the family. All family members, and any children they have can access their own support to guide them towards improving their relationships.

With courses, counselling and the opportunity to do fun family activities. This FREE support is available now.

To access any of our services, just call our helpline on **01803 446 022** or fill in the online form:



With thanks to support from

