



**MEDIATION FOR  
PARENTS IN 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 there is any physical aggression of any kind, mediation is not the correct service.

Further information can be found on the Anna Freud website [www.annafreud.org](http://www.annafreud.org) (type 'conflict and separation' in search box).

## What help is available?

We know that parents access help in different ways so we have organised the support available:

- **Online offer:** Free online courses for parents to do in their own time to support them in reducing parental conflict  
🏠 [www.oneplusone.org.uk/parents](http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/parents)
- **Group Offer:** Triple P transitions a parenting group or parents who are experiencing personal distress after separation or divorce, which is impacting on their parenting. Six weekly sessions.  
✉ [eparenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:eparenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk)
- **One to one:** Family mediation, a process where a trained, independent, neutral person works with two parties to help them resolve difficulties and make forward-looking plans. This is a structured, time-limited piece of work.  
✉ [familygroupconference@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:familygroupconference@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

## What is 'Mediation'?

Mediation is a process where a trained, independent, neutral person – the mediator – works with two 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.

## What is the RPC programme?

The RPC programme is funded for two years by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Tower Hamlets is one of the local authorities across England to integrate services and approaches which address parental conflict into their local services for families. Tower Hamlets is also working closely with the Early Intervention Foundation to build and share the evidence base.

Our RPC programme has evidence based interventions to minimise parental conflict :

- One plus one online programme
- Triple P transitions
- Family mediation alongside offer of Family Group Conference

## For more information

☎ **020 7364 5006** (option 2)  
✉ **earlyhelp@towerhamlets.gov.uk**

Drop-in 9am-5pm to Children and Family Centres

**[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/  
childrenandfamilycentres](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/childrenandfamilycentres)**



Early Help Reducing Parental Conflict  
**[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/rpc](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/rpc)**



Arguments Matter Leaflet for Parents  
**[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/parentconflict](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/parentconflict)**

## WHAT MIGHT HARMFUL PARENTAL CONFLICT LOOK LIKE?

- Stuck arguments that recur frequently about the same topic including finances, how time is spent, and how domestic tasks are split.
- 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**

## 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?
- Are the arguments in any way physical?



**For details on support services, visit:**  
[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/domesticabuse](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/domesticabuse)

If you are unsure whether to refer for mediation or for domestic abuse services, please ask for advice.

## 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.



## 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, 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.
- 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.

## 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 and 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.



