



HM Government

Understanding Parental Conflict and Its Impact on Child Outcomes

Reducing Parental Conflict - Raising Awareness

How can I use the evidence base to support parent relationships?

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Think Families Service



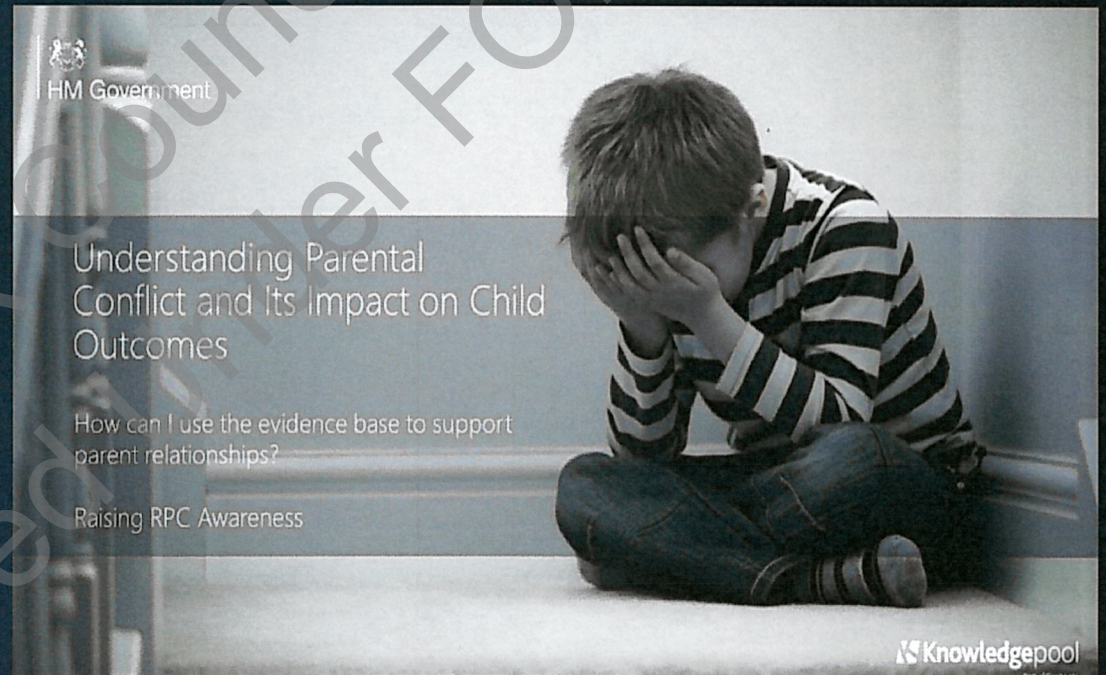
Quick introductions

Name

Job role

How much do I know already?

What would I like to get out of the awareness session?



What's in it for me?

This awareness session will help you to:

- Gain a greater awareness of what is meant by parental conflict and why this all matters
- Discuss why constructive conflict is okay and the signs that a relationship may be in distress
- Understand what the evidence base tells us about parental conflict
- Develop skills to recognise and identify the impact on children



Reducing Parental Conflict

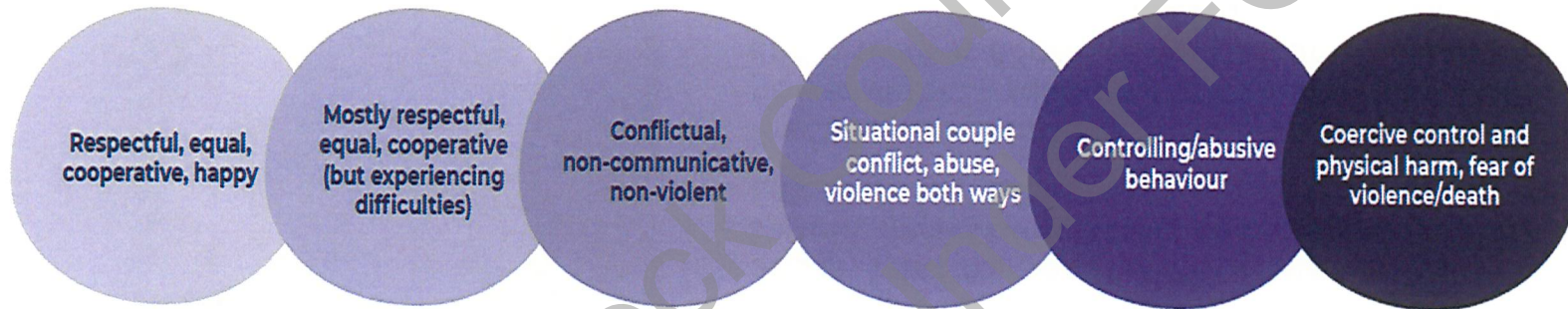
What is the difference between Reducing Parental Conflict and Domestic Abuse ?

Whilst damaging, parental conflict can be expressed in many ways, the 'Reducing Parental Conflict' programme is aimed at conflict which is below the threshold of domestic abuse. Parental Conflict is different from Domestic Abuse. If either parent has experienced Domestic Abuse (fearful and there is an imbalance of power and control), then RPC approaches would not be appropriate for those parents ~ DWP

Parental Conflict can range from a lack of warmth and emotional distance, through to swearing and shouting.

- Conflict is often frequent
- intense
- Poorly resolved.
- Parental conflict is a known risk factor for poor child outcomes.

Parental Relationships Spectrum*



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 Family Practitioner; 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
Family assessment; consider referral to local relationships 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
Family assessment; contact your local helpline or the National Domestic Abuse Helpline for advice/access to services

SITUATION
Clearer 'victim' and clearer 'abuser'

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

ACTION
Family assessment; follow domestic abuse pathways/processes; refer to children's services

SITUATION
Clear 'abuser' and clear 'victim' who is at significant risk of harm

Children at risk of significant harm; children being traumatised

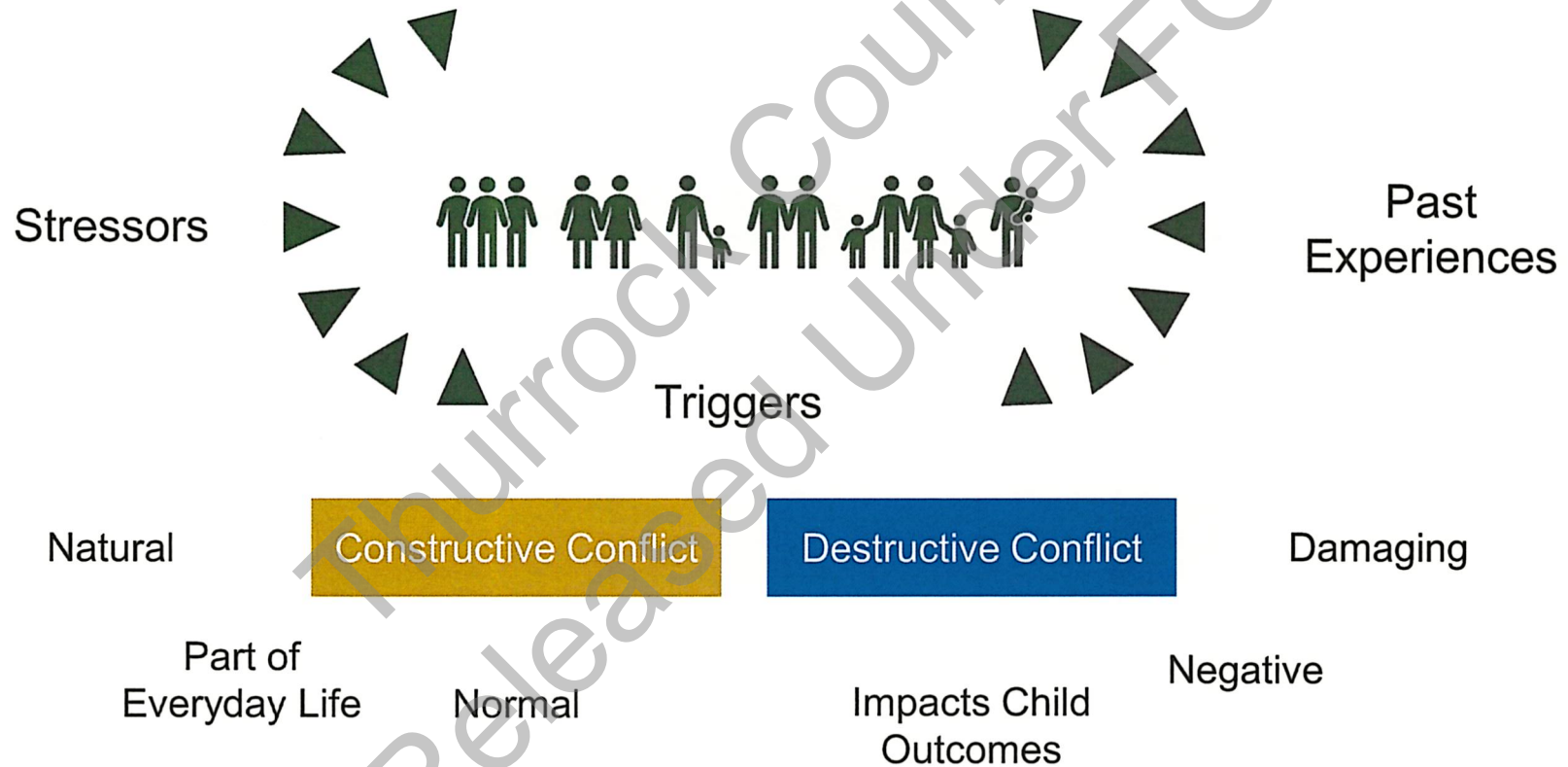
ACTION
Referral to specialist domestic abuse service(s); refer to children's services

Domestic Abuse in the Context of this Parental Conflict Awareness



- By having conversations about relationships, staff are better placed to identify parental conflict including domestic abuse
- When exploring or addressing parental conflict within a relationship, practitioners should continue to be vigilant and confident there are no indicators of domestic abuse, including coercive control
- Should any concern be identified that could indicate domestic abuse, local policies and procedures to address domestic abuse should always be followed and the priority should be managing any potential risk of harm
- Practitioners should be curious and alert to an imbalance of power within a relationship that adversely affects one person and is used as a form of control; or where at least one person feels fear - this is one indicator of an abusive relationship
- If you would like more information about domestic abuse, please discuss with your line manager, local domestic abuse services or designated safeguarding lead

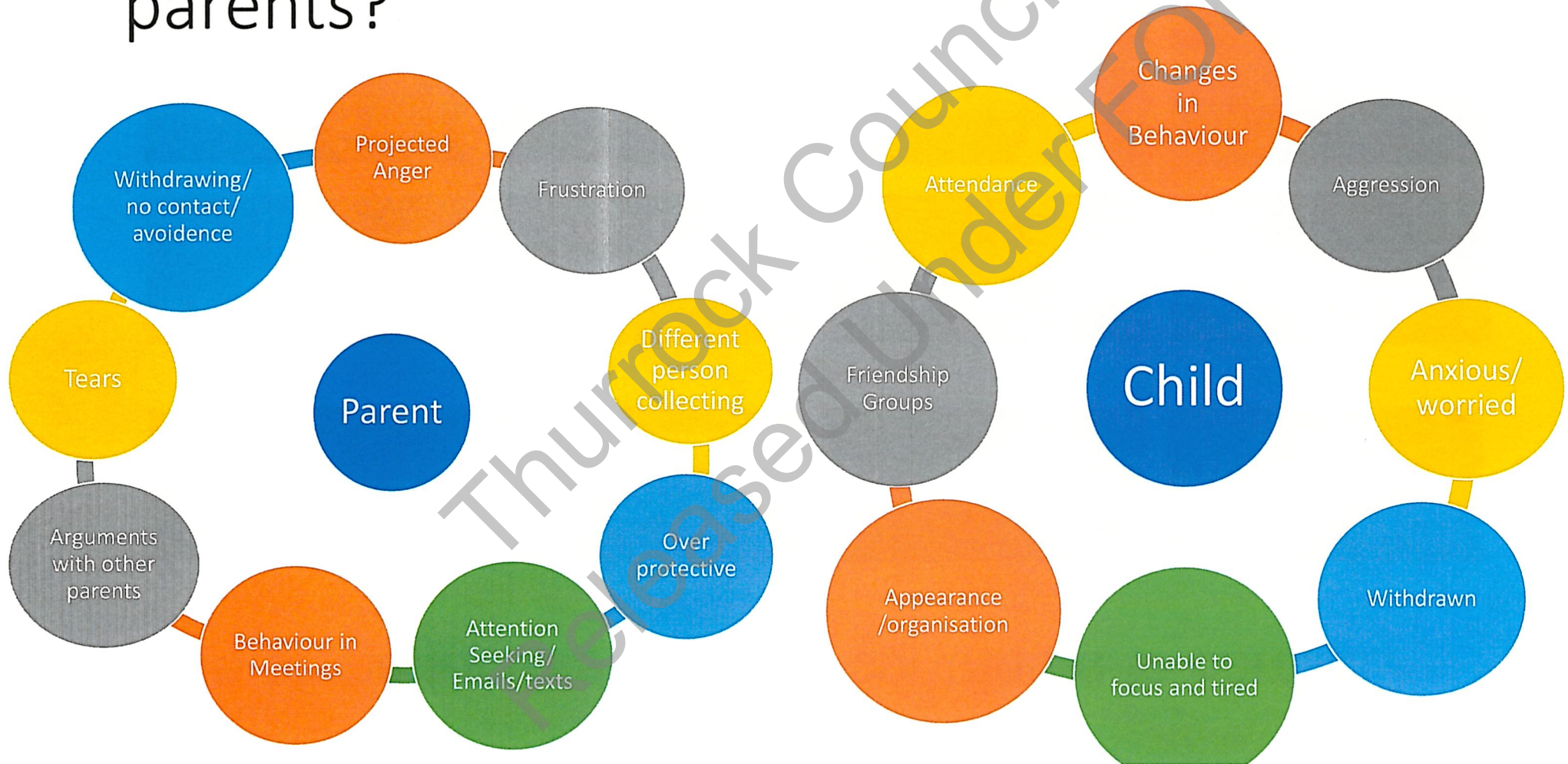
Conflict in relationships is a reality.....



Some of the factors that can contribute to conflict?

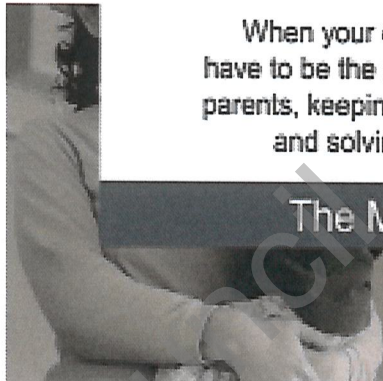
Money	Parenting Style	Division of Household Tasks	Extended Family Relationships (In Laws)
Work or unemployment	Sex and Intimacy	Infidelity	Sibling Rivalry
Housing	Shared Responsibilities	Social Media	Babies

How might conflict manifest in children and parents?



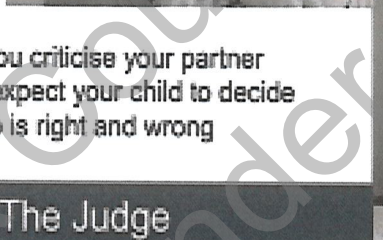
Children in the Middle

- Research indicates that when parents put their children in the middle of their conflict then it can be harmful.
- Helping parents to identify the ways they might be doing this is an important first step in encouraging change.



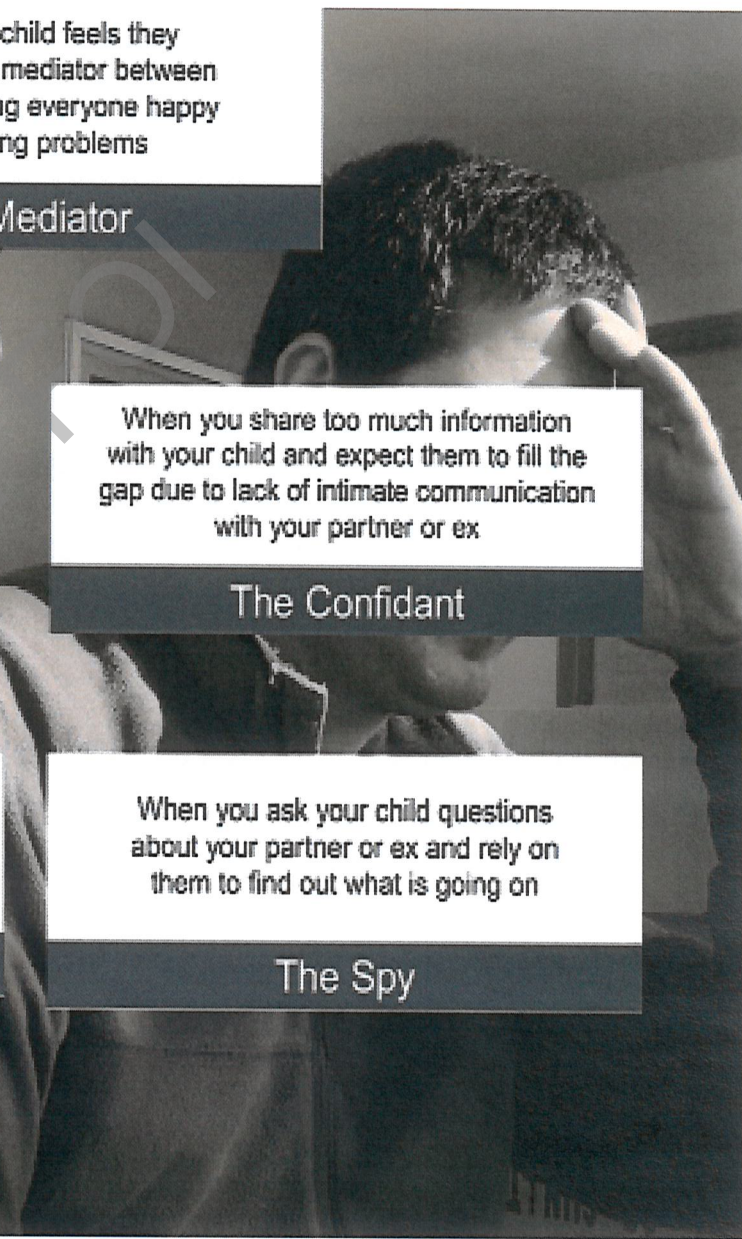
When your child feels they have to be the mediator between parents, keeping everyone happy and solving problems

The Mediator



When you criticise your partner or ex and expect your child to decide who is right and wrong

The Judge



When you share too much information with your child and expect them to fill the gap due to lack of intimate communication with your partner or ex

The Confidant

When you ask your child to take information between you and your partner about money, contact etc

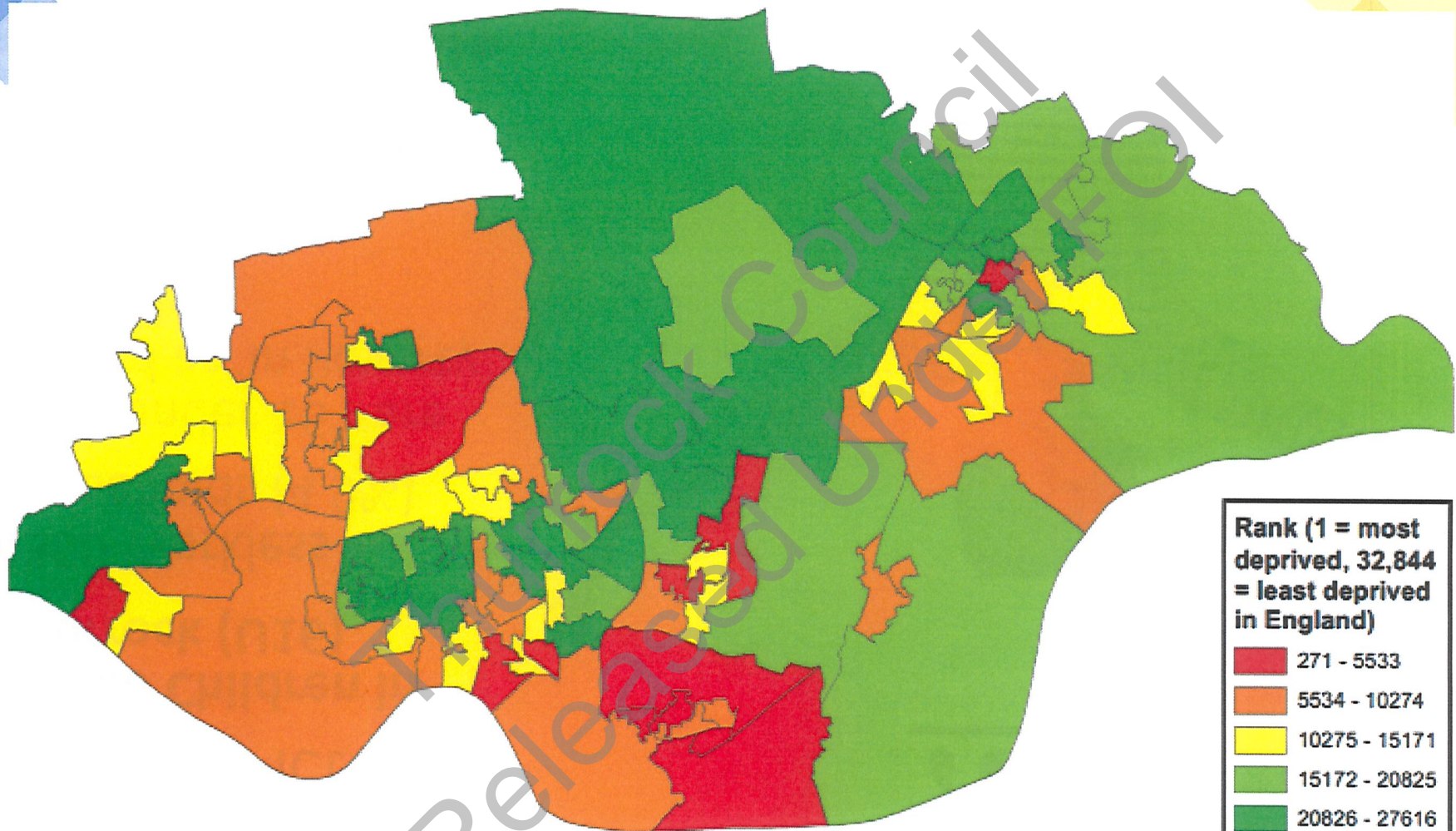
The Messenger

When you ask your child questions about your partner or ex and rely on them to find out what is going on

The Spy

• **What does the evidence tell us?**

- 1 in 5 married or cohabiting couples are in relationships which are classified as “distressed”
- Parental conflict, which is frequent, intense and poorly resolved, (whether parents are together or separated) places children at risk of poor social, emotional and educational outcomes
- 3.6million children were believed to be living in separated households in 2020 ~ around half of children believed not to be having regular contact with non-resident parent
- 32% of children are believed to be living with at least one parent who has mental ill health
- Stressors including poverty, worklessness, addiction, parenting, culture impact the relationship and outcomes for children



**Rank (1 = most
deprived, 32,844
= least deprived
in England)**

271 - 5533

5534 - 10274

10275 - 15171

15172 - 20825

20826 - 27616

Thurrock Picture

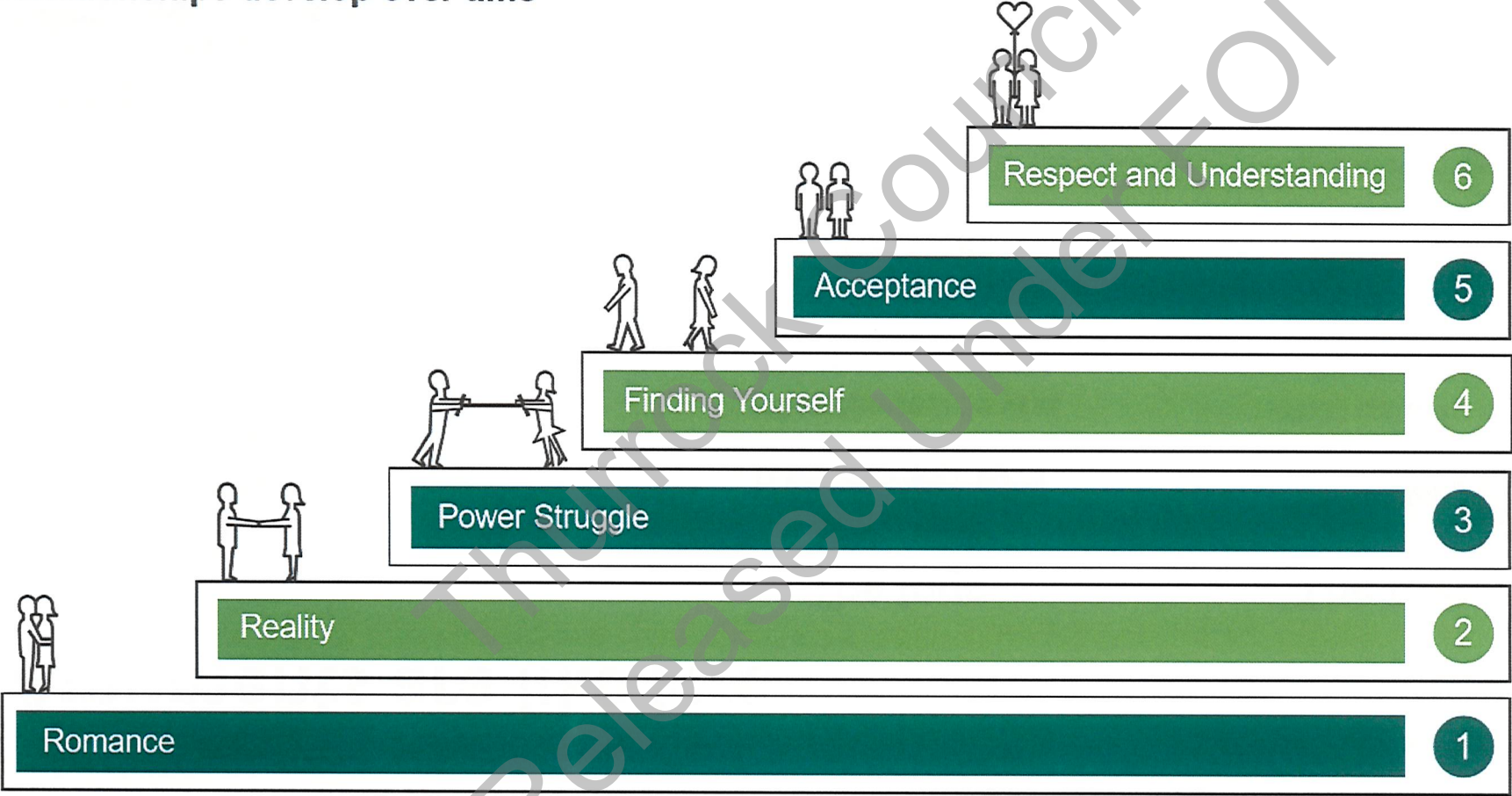
- **36,900 Children in Thurrock (U16)**
- **4300 Workless households (4.9%)**
- **7800** under 16's are classed as 'in Poverty (21.2%)
- Deprivation. Overall levels of deprivation in Thurrock are lower than the national average, but some areas of Thurrock are among the 20% most deprived in England.

7800



Stages of relationships

Relationships develop over time



Arguments are like Fire



The logs



What issues do you argue about most?

The fuel



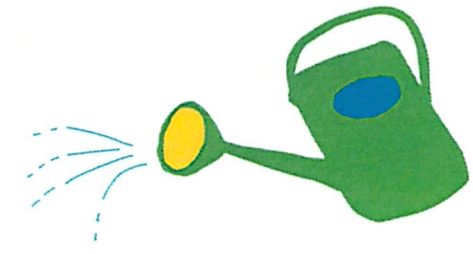
What makes it worse?
Are you fueling the fire?

The match



What usually starts an argument?

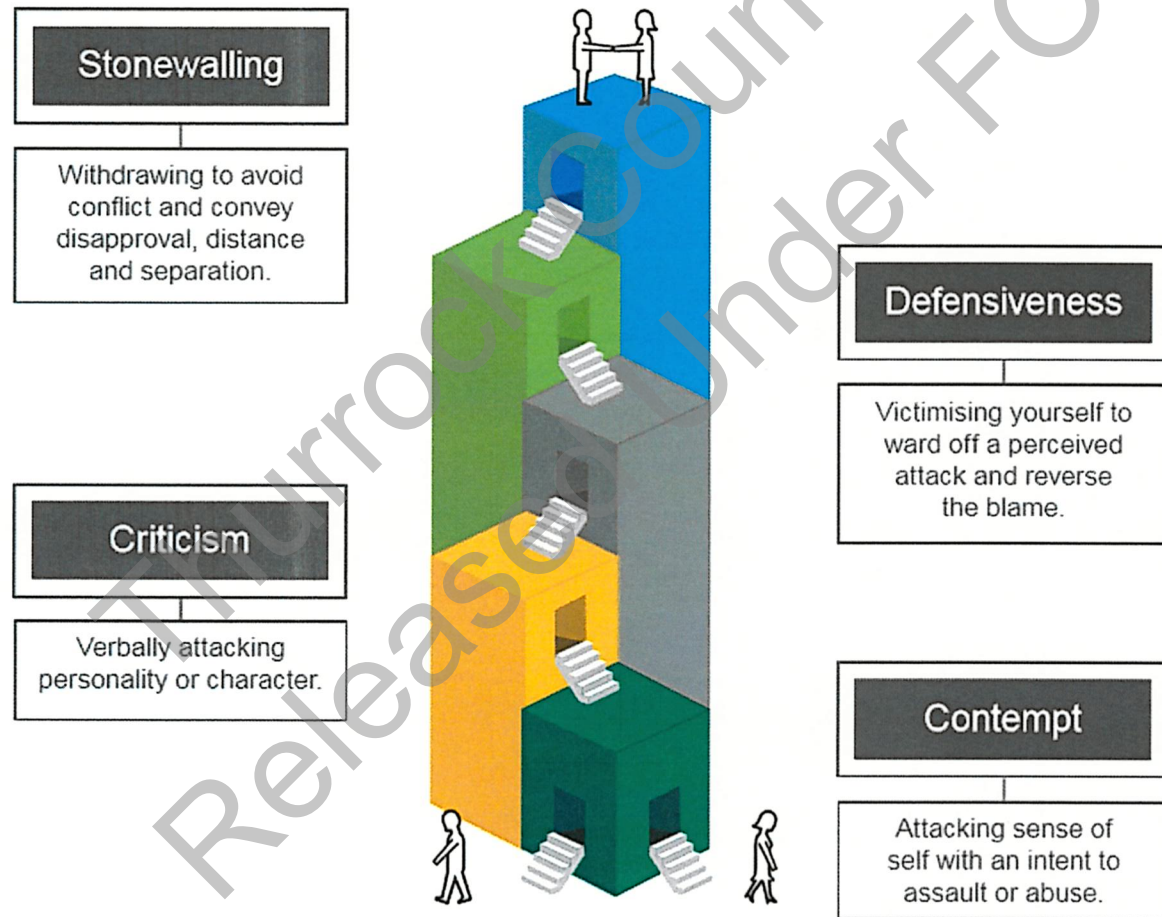
The water



What helps calm things down?

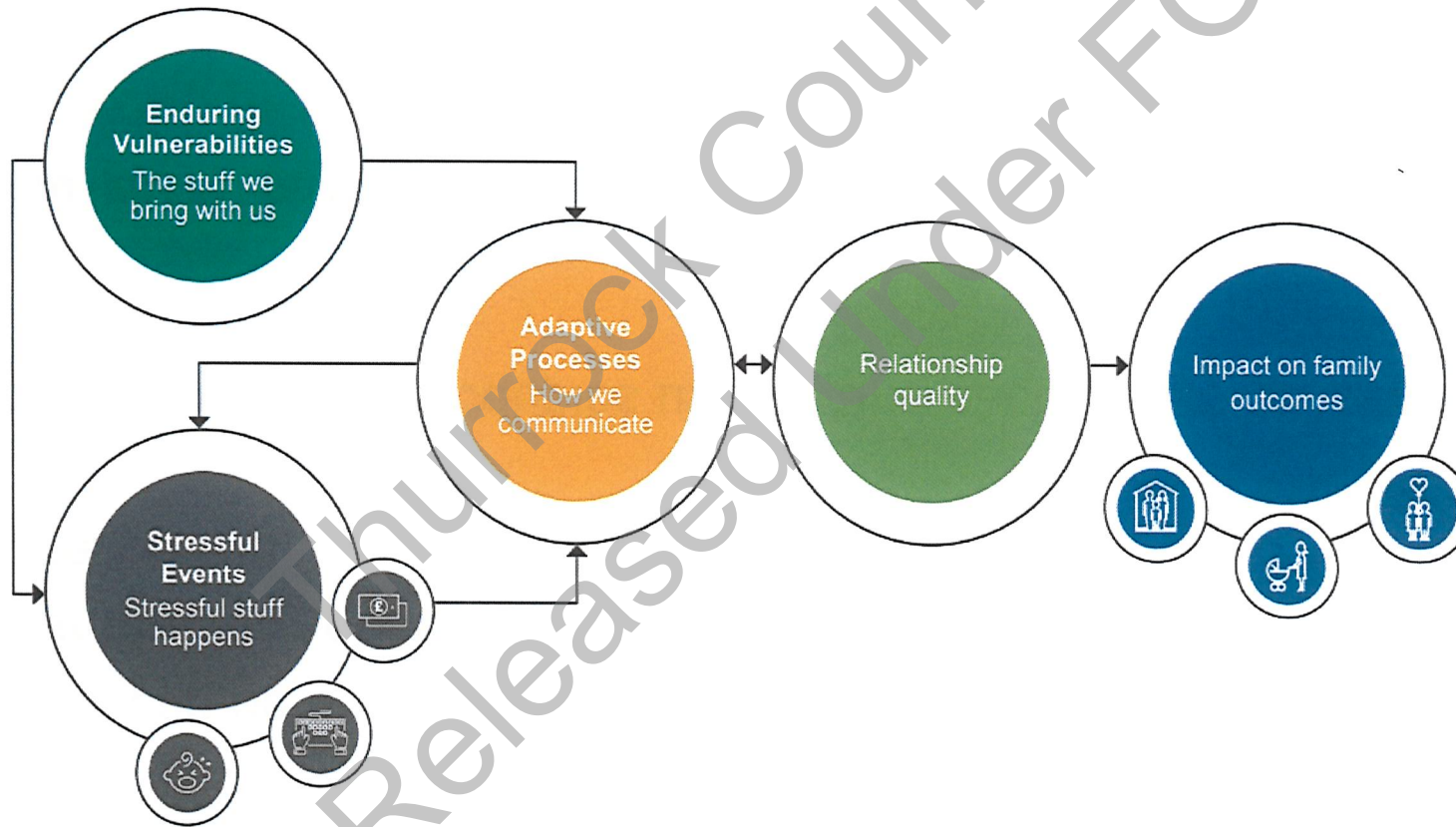
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Relationship breakdown...



(The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, Gottman 1994)

Relationships (Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model)



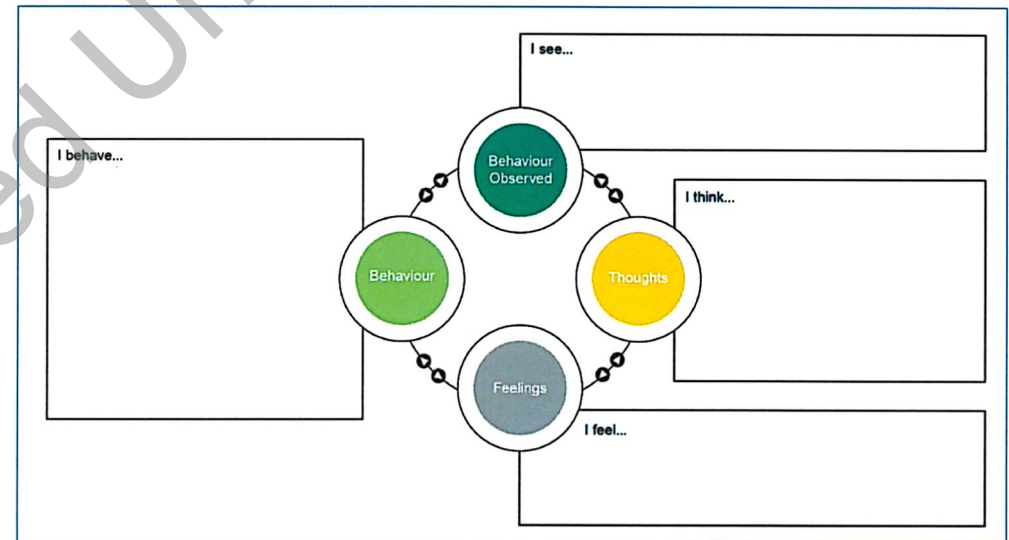
(Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model)

Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour Exercise

This model can be used to help couples to recognise how they internalise behaviour that they observe which in turn affects how they feel, impacting on their response.

This can be used to help couples understand each others behaviour.

When you ignore me when the football is on, I think this means you don't want to be around me, this makes me feel unloved, I slam doors in the kitchen to let you know I am not happy.



Our Typical Day

- A simple template to help family's identify what and when may be triggers to conflict in their relationship.
- Once identified you can work with the family to find alternative ways to behaviour that may not involve harmful conflict

Our typical day

	What my day looks like	Triggers to conflict
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		
Night		

What the child is hearing ?

How is the child feeling?

What behaviour might you see when they come into school the next morning?



Principles for working with parents

- Be curious, identify what is really going on
- Avoid making assumptions
- Don't take sides
- Keep the couple focused on the task in hand – parenting together
- Be clear about how much time is available
- Stay away from “fix it” mode
- Encourage each partner to listen to the other
- If things get very heated, ask them to take time out.

! Refer/signpost sensitively to another agency if the conflict can't be resolved

! Remember you are not a couple's counsellor; however, you can do a lot to help co-parents argue in ways that are not damaging to their children

Tools for working with parents in conflict

Identifying parental conflict

- ✓ Relationship scaling tool
- ✓ Stages of relationships

Exploring the causes of the conflict

- ✓ What's going on for us? (VSA)
- ✓ Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour
- ✓ Our Typical Day

Supporting constructive conflict communication

- ✓ Constructive or destructive
- ✓ Children in the middle role cards
- ✓ I statements



Thurrock Council
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