Parental Relationships Spectrum*

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

SITUATION
All relationships have tricky moments, it’s how they’re experienced and resolved that matters

Mostly respectful, equal, cooperative (but experiencing difficulties)

Confictual, non-communicative, non-violent

Situational couple conflict, abuse, violence both ways

Respectful, equal, cooperative, happy

Conflictual, non-communicative, non-violent

Controlling/abusive behaviour

Coercive control and physical harm, fear of violence/death

Children are experiencing constructive resolution of any arguments, characterised by mutual respect and emotional control

Children beginning to be affected by conflict between their parents

Children being adversely affected

Children being adversely affected; children may show signs of distress and their mental health/behaviour may be affected

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

Children at risk of significant harm; children being traumatised

ACTION
Early conversation initiated by Family Practitioner; direct to sources of self-help

Family assessment; consider referral to local relationships support services

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

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

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

INTER-COUPLE/PARENTAL CONFLICT

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/ABUSE

Lack of open and honest communication; difficulties are minimised, not recognised or addressed

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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What aspects of your relationship trouble you?</td>
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<td>What would you change if you had the opportunity?</td>
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<td>How understanding is your partner?</td>
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<td>How safe do you feel at home and in your relationship?</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>How confident do you feel about making decisions?</td>
<td>These questions might indicate the presence of coercive or controlling behaviour with the relationship.</td>
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<td>How comfortable do you feel about expressing your own views and opinions?</td>
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<td>How much choice do you have about your own life and family life?</td>
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<td>Where is the joy in your life?</td>
<td>Those in an abusive relationship may feel the lack of joy in their life and start to see the reality of the situation.</td>
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<td>What would your children say about life at home?</td>
<td>These questions could lead to a discussion about the impact on the children who may be experiencing conflict or abuse between their parents.</td>
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<td>What changes, if any, have you noticed in your children’s behaviour?</td>
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<td>What prevents you from asking for support?</td>
<td>This question may lead to a discussion about how the parent and/or family could be enabled to access the support they need.</td>
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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/](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