

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

THE NORTH EAST'S REDUCING PARENTAL CONFLICT PROGRAMME (RPCP)



RELATIONSHIPS MATTER IS HERE FOR KEY WORKERS TOO.

Our team at the Gateway have been in touch with Occupational Health professionals across the patch. If you are supporting a member of staff who has children and is experiencing relationship distress, please see our contact details on the back page for a confidential discussion.

If anyone reading this bulletin lives or works in one of our areas, and would like to talk to us about receiving support, you can contact us also. It is **entirely confidential** and you do not need your manager's permission to take part. For more information [click here](#).

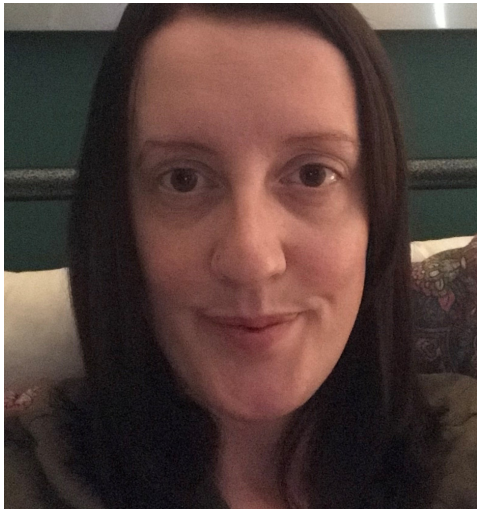
**Welcome to the fourth monthly
bulletin for Front Line Practitioners**

REFERRAL GATEWAY WILL BE CLOSED ON THE FOLLOWING DATES OVER THE FESTIVE PERIOD:

Friday 24 December
Monday 27 December
Tuesday 28 December
Friday 31 December
Monday 3 January



Christmas and Family Relationships



Jude Gordon, RPC Delivery
Manager, Relate

As we hurtle towards Christmas 2021, here at Relationships Matter, we are thinking about the parents out there who have been juggling the needs of their families under the immense pressure of COVID-19 for nearly two years now.

As the Delivery Manager in a dedicated team working with parents in need of relationship support (separate or together), I know all too well the importance of relationships and family time in households, but also the seriousness of burnout and stress for parents.

Managing a balance of paid and unpaid work can feel precarious at the best of times, but throw in financial issues, work-related stress,

existing mental health issues and parenting woes alongside the Christmas overload, it's a sure-fire road to relationship conflict.

The parents we speak to as part of our work often need reassurance, human connection, and kindness. This time of year can feel so overwhelming that parents may find it harder than ever to reach out and ask for support. After all, social media tells us that if we aren't making a million trips out to expensive festive delights, then we must be failing as parents, right? Wrong. I read a lovely meme recently by a teacher which highlighted what children talk about when they return to school after the holidays; clue: it isn't how much money parents spent on gifts. It's quality time, presence, eating together, playing.

Contact arrangements between separated parents can also be



a source of conflict at this time of year. If you're working with a family where this is an issue, the parent who does not have contact with their kids on Christmas Day may be feeling very sad and lonely, but we encourage separated parents to remember that there are positives to children having two Christmases! It is even better if adults can show children that they made it work with support from their co-parent. We can (and should) include both parents in conversations about stress and social isolation, and recognise when tensions and arguments in the household have spilled over into something more; something unsettling and difficult for families to navigate without help.

Here at Relationships Matter, we make the extra effort to connect, because some parents are running out of energy and they need us to do that for them right now.

If we leave 2021 with any insight at all, it should surely be that **relationships really do matter.**

Relate recently carried out a study which found:

- 61% of respondents said that lockdown had made them realise that relationships are the most important thing in their lives.
- 41% of men have become more comfortable opening up to their partners about their emotions.
- 30% of families want to keep up spending time outside and having family walks.

These are great habits for the Christmas holidays, helping combat stress and keep tension to a minimum.

One Family's Experience of Parenting When Separated*

Groupwork For Co-Parents

Esther and Adrian are separated and have a one-year-old daughter called Willow. The family was referred by social services after mum, Esther, took an overdose, and dad, Adrian, exercised his parental right to keep Willow in his full-time care.

Adrian was unfaithful whilst married to Esther, and is now living with the person he met during their marriage. This was an area of high emotion and anxiety for Esther, and she struggled seeing this person at pick up/drop off time. As a result, Esther and Adrian found it hard to communicate with one another and conversations often lead to arguments which would further impact Esther's mental health and Willow's ability to settle.

After the referral to Relationships Matter, both Esther and Adrian accessed the **Parenting When Separated** provision, which was delivered online over six weeks. Esther and Adrian attended different groups and soon became valued, talkative and supportive members of their respective groups.

Despite the difficulties they both faced, Esther and Adrian understood the effect the conflict between them was having on their little girl, and they took on board the tasks that were set during the six-week programme. For example, one week we encouraged Esther and Adrian to thank one another for something such as taking Willow to the park. If this was too difficult we asked them to simply be polite toward one another in front of Willow with a cheery hello and goodbye at handover time. Both Esther and Adrian reported back the following week that they had done this and noticed their co-parent also making the effort. This continued for the remaining weeks of the programme.

In one of their sessions, both Adrian and Esther identified the same issue they had trouble dealing with: that if the other parent told them about something they had done with Willow it was often seen as competition. Some other parents in the group agreed and they all discussed why this might be, and how damaging it could be to their kids. In the following weeks both Esther and Adrian said they had been sharing more of what Willow did in her time with the other parent and were sending pictures to one another. Both parents admitted they were actually enjoying finding out more about what Willow was doing, and advised other parents in the group to do the same.



Esther, however, still lacked confidence, and she asked for additional support. Whilst she was happy with the progress they were both making she was worried that once the programme had ended Adrian would ask too much of her, and she would not be in the same place as he was. The facilitator accommodated this request, and Esther explored how she might approach Adrian to talk about these worries. Esther was very brave, and did just that. She concluded she felt a lot safer and more able to have discussions like this with Adrian in a positive way.

**This case study has been anonymised.*

What is different now?

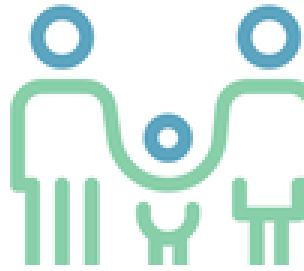
- Esther and Adrian are managing to be polite during handover times and have noticed the impact this is having on Willow.
- Esther and Adrian now have 50-50 care of Willow and have a routine which is working well.
- The handover process has been altered to help Esther feel more comfortable seeing Adrian's new partner.
- Adrian has learnt not to take it personally if Esther does something he does not agree with, accepting that they will always parent differently.

REDUCING PARENTAL CONFLICT INTERVENTIONS

SPOTLIGHT ON:



Parenting when Separated Course



When relationships break down, it can be very tough for everyone involved. **Parenting When Separated** is a free six-week course to support parents who are no longer in a relationship with their child's other parent. It can help them to personally cope, provide them with tactics to better support their children and help them to co-parent their children in a more positive way.

We have several courses running during **January and February 2022**. Please see contact details below to discuss any parents you think would benefit.

To find out more about **Parenting When Separated**, you can watch this [short video](#).

You can find out more about the Relationships Matter Programme in this [five-minute video](#).

For information on how to refer parents, visit the Referral Gateway website [here](#).

Or you can pick up the phone and we would be more than happy to discuss the family who might benefit:

Referral Gateway Coordinator, Gemma Ozap-Marshall, 0191 433 3355 / 07860 735990

Referral Gateway Support Worker, Jackie Liddell, 07874 884996

Email addresses are:

Gemma Ozap-Marshall, Referral Gateway Coordinator -

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Jackie Liddell, Referral Gateway Support Worker - JackieLiddell@gateshead.gov.uk

The Relationships Matter interventions are delivered in the North East by Relate, Changing Futures North East (in the Tees Valley), and Action for Children Ltd., and funded by the Department for Work and Pensions