

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

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

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER IS HERE FOR STAFF TOO

If you are reading this bulletin and wondering if you, yourself, can seek support, yes you can.

The services we offer parents is not just for the families you work with. It is for anyone who lives, works or uses services in the north east.

If you and your partner or ex-partner are finding it difficult to find common ground when it comes to the kids, just contact us by clicking [here](#).

All of our services are **confidential** and you do not need your manager's permission to participate.



Welcome to the fifth monthly bulletin
for Front Line Practitioners

LAST DATE FOR REFERRALS IS

****16th March 2022****



FROM THE FRONT LINE



*Fiona Smith, Operations Manager,
One Point, Durham*

As Relationships Matter enters its final months, we spoke to Fiona Smith about her experiences of working with the Reducing Parental Conflict programme.

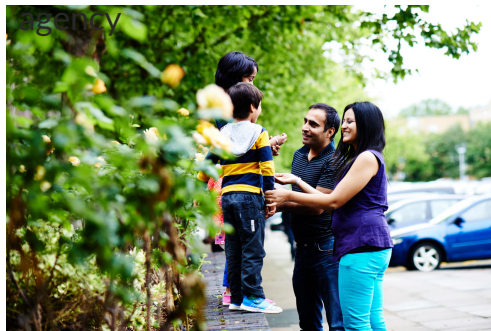
How have you found working in partnership with the other local authorities in the area?

"Being part of the programme has been a fantastic experience. We have had excellent support and guidance from our regional lead for DWP, and regular meetings with our local authority contacts has helped establish positive working relationships and encouraged networking beyond the RPC agenda. Working with neighbouring authorities brings

opportunities to reflect on your own local authority's approach, share ideas and best practice and, most importantly, work collaboratively to create a consistent approach to relationship support across the region."

What has the feedback been like for your staff and the parents they work with?

"Feedback from staff in supporting families to access RPC specialist interventions has been hugely positive. Communication is always key, and the Gateway and Relate have excelled at keeping Lead Professionals 'in the loop'. The Gateway has provided much needed support, advice and guidance to practitioners, especially when there has been one resistant parent. The Gateway have gone above and beyond in helping to address this, and further supports Durham by delivering staff briefings, attending our multi-



RPC Steering Group to update on performance, and is always happy to support LAs in any way they can, for example, to pilot new ways of working to help progress the RPC agenda."

What do you hope to see next?

"For Durham, I hope to see relationship support embedded across the whole system from universal through to targeted and specialist support. We are already striving to build a sustainable model in Durham by building capacity across our partnership in respect of continued RPC training with a pool of Train the Trainers. Additionally, we have Early Help workers trained in the specialist intervention, Parenting When Separated. Next steps for Durham would be to harness the expertise of parents themselves, with lived experience, and use them as peer mentors in local communities. We want parents to continue to tell us what they want and help in shaping Durham's 'Relationships Matter' support offer."

“ I hope to see confident practitioners who will discuss relationship quality with parents and children as an integral and consistent part of their daily work. ”

One Family's Experience of MBT: Parenting Under Pressure*

Sally aged 40, and Tom aged 41 from Redcar have been married for 16 years. They have two sons, James and Jack, aged 14 and 12 respectively. Both Dad, Tom, and Jack are diagnosed with Asperger's.

Sally and Tom both come from stable family backgrounds where their parents were together until 2017 when Sally lost her father and 2020 when Tom lost his mother. Both of these losses had an impact on Sally, Tom and the boys.

They describe their relationship as starting to deteriorate approximately 6 years ago. Sally feels this is due to the lack of support she receives from Tom, particularly in respect of managing the challenges of their younger son and his Asperger's diagnosis. This, Sally feels, has not only impacted on their parental relationship but significantly on their couple relationship. She feels alone and isolated in the family unit which, in terms of their couple relationship, lacks warmth, understanding and intimacy.

Tom describes similar feelings to Sally but also says that due to his diagnosis he needs clear communication and instruction from Sally who will frequently say, "You should know what I mean," "You should know how I feel," and "You should know what I want or need."

Tom took up running following a drastic weight reduction 5 years ago. His appearance and confidence changed as a result.



**This case study has been anonymised.*

His membership of the running clubs means Tom uses his mobile phone a lot, which makes Sally feel insecure, as she feels he is conducting relationships with other women who are fit and attractive. Tom denies any relationships with anyone other than Sally.



They both state that they love each other and want their relationship to improve for themselves and also for their sons' benefit. They recognise that their arguments and the tension generated within the family home is impacting seriously on the boys, particularly the youngest, Jack, who is displaying verbally and physically challenging behaviour at school and at home.

Sally and Tom also both recognise there was a further deterioration in their relationship during the lengthy periods of lockdown as neither had the release of going out to work on a daily basis and had to manage working from home whilst managing the boys, and they describe the house at that time as being like "a volcano constantly ready to explode."

Throughout the MBT intervention the couple explored solutions. Both Sally and Tom discussed how they could listen to each other rather than the previous default position of arguments, tension, hostility, blame and lack of understanding regarding each others feelings, mood and needs. They explored how they could spend more time together as a family and as a couple, how Tom could reduce time spent running and on his phone, and what would help Sally build up her confidence.

As the sessions progressed, their relationship began to improve significantly. Sally tried to ensure that communication was clear regarding what was happening with the boys and school. Tom became the first point of contact with the school, reducing Sally's stress considerably. A couple of evenings a week Tom began to cook healthy meals with his sons and they ate as a family together, and Tom and Sally now go out regularly as a couple, and save Saturdays for family time: trips out and activities with the children.

They now build regular time into their day so they are clear what the arrangements are for the day in terms of the children and their activities.



What difference has it made?

- Tom is feeling more included with the care and parenting of the boys
- Significant improvement in Jack's behaviour at school and at home
- New focus on their strengths as parents, working together to parent their sons
- They can identify challenges and bumps in the road ahead, and their own needs as individuals

Want to know more about **MBT: Parenting Under Pressure?**

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:

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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