



Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

A self-assessment planning tool to support local authorities and their partners to deliver a system-wide approach to reducing the negative impact of conflict between parents on their children.

Planning to reduce parental conflict

Healthy relationships between parents are an important focus for early intervention and local family services. The quality of the relationship between parents, specifically how they communicate and relate to each other, has a significant influence on effective parenting and child outcomes.

Reducing parental conflict is a complex issue which requires a system-wide approach. This self-assessment tool is designed to support local leaders and commissioners to identify local system strengths and areas for development, and to monitor progress over time.

In this document you will find:

- A brief overview of the evidence on parental conflict, and link to further information.
- An introduction to using a systemic approach to reduce the impact of parental conflict on children.
- Descriptors for 10 key elements which make up a reducing parental conflict system.
- A single-page summary of the Planning Tool.

Introducing the evidence

Conflict between parents can harm children's outcomes

1. Conflict between parents is a normal part of relationships. In fact, seeing how their parents disagree is very important for children. However, when children are exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved parental conflict, this can have a damaging and long-term impact on them.
2. This kind of destructive conflict can range from intense quarrels to verbal or physical aggression, including conflicts that are about or involve the children, the 'silent' treatment, lack of respect and emotional control, and a lack of resolution. Responses to domestic abuse are not part of the national Reducing Parental Conflict Programme, which focuses on destructive conflict that is not violent or abusive.

3. Children and young people of all ages can be affected. Exposure to destructive parental conflict for children and young people is associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties, academic problems, physical health problems, risk-taking behaviours and interpersonal relationship problems.
4. Parental conflict can harm children's outcomes regardless of whether parents are together or separated, or are biologically related to the child, such as in blended or foster families.

Some families are more vulnerable to parental conflict

5. Financial difficulties can impact on parental mental health, which can increase parental conflict. This in turn can impact on parenting and children's outcomes.
6. Data from the Department for Work and Pensions suggests that children in workless families are twice as likely to experience damaging parental conflict as those where both parents are working.

Reducing parental conflict requires specific and inclusive interventions

7. Interventions which focus on supporting the parent-child relationship (such as parenting programmes) in the context of parental conflict are unlikely to improve outcomes for children unless they also address the conflict.
8. Effective interventions have some common features. They help parents to understand the impacts of conflict behaviours, and what they could do differently. They build skills to help parents to communicate more effectively and avoid conflict. For parents who are separating, they build motivation to strengthen the quality of parenting and not to undermine the other parent. They target key transition points, such as becoming a parent or a child's school transition.
9. Parental conflict may have more of a negative impact on the father-child relationship than the mother-child relationship. The evidence suggests that fathers are more likely to respond to parental conflict by withdrawing from or being hostile towards their children. In addition, parental separation can lead to reduced contacts between children and non-resident parents, who are typically fathers.

Go to the **Reducing Parental Conflict Hub** at <https://reducingparentalconflict.eif.org.uk/> To find out more about the evidence relating to parental conflict and a range of practical planning resources.

A systemic approach

Tackling parental conflict is complex. It depends on effective local arrangements for strategy & planning, leading change, delivering effective single and multi-agency working, and evaluating progress. These four dimensions (**PLAN, LEAD, DELIVER, EVALUATE**) form the Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool, which is designed to guide local arrangements to reduce the impact of parental conflict on their children.

Each dimension has two or three key elements which are described at five different progress levels to allow a local area to rate their current position and identify the steps they need to take to improve.

Destructive conflict can include domestic violence and abuse, but the focus of this Planning Tool is on non-abusive conflict between parents which is frequent, intense and poorly resolved. This Planning Tool does not describe the system and processes for local responses to domestic violence and abuse.

This Planning Tool is one of a suite of early intervention matrices developed by EIF and is produced in partnership with HM Government as part of the national Reducing Parental Conflict Programme. The design draws on work by the Good Governance Institute, EIF's 'Pioneering Places' and the Department for Work & Pension's Local Family Offer sites.

Using the planning tool

The Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool is designed to support practical change through positive challenge within local partnerships. It can also be used to set a baseline and track progress over time.

The Tool and the corresponding worksheet are particularly effective as the basis for a structured stakeholder workshop, sharing different views and building consensus about progress and priorities. You may want to take account of following if using the Tool in this way:

- Reducing parental conflict is a complex issue which involves a range of different organisations. Make sure to involve strategic and operational stakeholders from across the spectrum of services and organisations that provide child and family services.
- No one sees the whole picture, so planning workshops are most effective when there is lots of time to hear different perspectives, to hear from families themselves, and to find common ground.
- Stakeholders often need to take time to understand what the evidence says about parental conflict and child impact before being able to actively engage in a local assessment and plan.
- The purpose of the workshop is to move from talk to action, so sufficient time should be allowed for agreeing specific next steps.

DIMENSIONS	KEY ELEMENTS	PROGRESS LEVELS				
PLAN	1. Strategy	<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>ENTRY LEVEL</p> <p>Family services yet to prioritise parental conflict but provide strong foundations</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>FIRST STEPS</p> <p>Principle of tackling parental conflict is accepted and there is commitment to action</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>EARLY PROGRESS</p> <p>Initial development to tackle parental conflict</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS</p> <p>Initial results achieved and positive outcomes evident</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>MATURE</p> <p>Embedded good practice, others learning from achievements</p>
	2. Commissioning					
	3. Workforce planning					
LEAD	4. Partnership					
	5. Leadership					
	6. Community ownership					
DELIVER	7. Services and interventions					
	8. Information & data					
EVALUATE	9. Outcomes framework					
	10. Using & generating evidence					

Common typologies

Every local area is different. However, there are some common typologies for areas using the Planning Tool. This policy agenda feels very new and many local areas are at the very start of the journey. Some, however, are further ahead.

1 Type 1: Starting off

- No infrastructure specific to parental conflict yet
- Early discussions amongst stakeholders
- All or most of the Planning Tool key elements are scored as **1 Entry Level**.

FOCUS ON:

- **Making the case for change to key stakeholders**
- **Identifying a Senior Responsible Owner who can make things happen**
- **Improving understanding of the evidence**
- **Agreeing first steps to build local workforce understanding of parental conflict.**

2 Type 2: Becoming established

- Some key champions & infrastructure specific to parental conflict and this work has a growing local profile.
- Planning Tool key elements usually scored as between **2 First Steps** and **3 Early Progress**.
- Building investment in workforce training and evidence based interventions

FOCUS ON:

- **Test and learn - making sure that the local infrastructure for using data and measuring impact is secure**
- **Enhancing quality and reach within core services**
- **Embedding approaches within wider network of relevant services.**

3 Type 3: Making good progress

- Well established and high profile approach to reducing parental conflict, embedded within wider child and family services.
- Planning Tool key elements usually scored as between **3 Early Progress** and **4 Substantial Progress**
- Starting to share learning with wider audiences

FOCUS ON:

- **Peer / independent challenge on impact**
- **Pooling and sharing learning**
- **Sustaining and expanding effective approaches.**

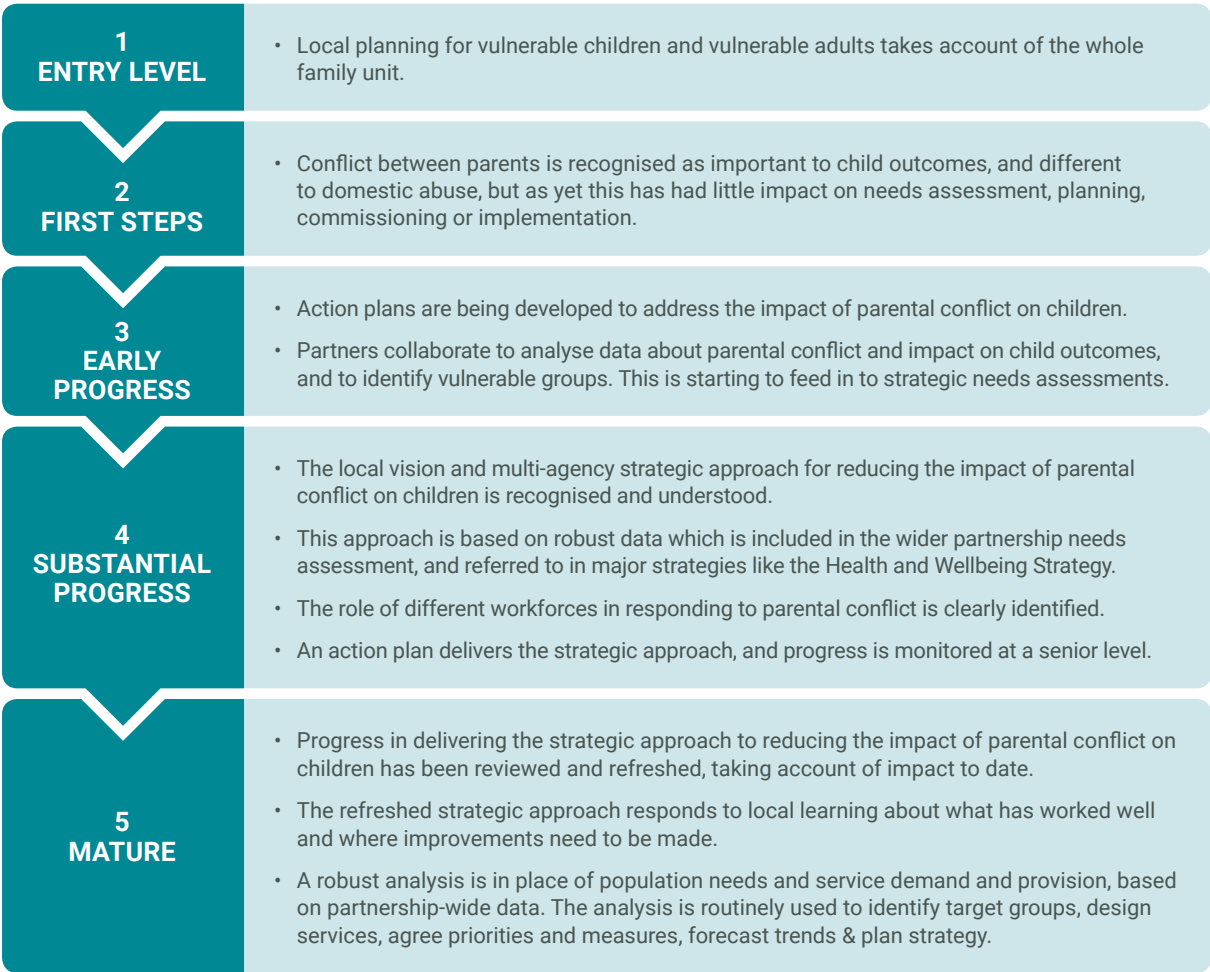
QUICK CHECK SUMMARY Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

A larger worksheet version is available at <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/reducing-parental-conflict-planning-tool>

KEY ELEMENTS		PROGRESS LEVELS				
		① Entry level <i>Family services yet to prioritise parental conflict but provide strong foundations</i>	② First steps <i>Principle of tackling parental conflict is accepted and there is commitment to action</i>	③ Early progress <i>Initial development to tackle parental conflict</i>	④ Substantial progress <i>Initial results achieved and positive outcomes evident</i>	⑤ Mature <i>Embedded good practice, others learning from achievements</i>
PLAN	1. Strategy	Local service planning considers whole family	RPC is recognised as important & different to domestic abuse	RPC action plans are being developed & partners collaborate on RPC data	Local vision & multi-agency strategy for RPC in place	Strategy for RPC is refreshed taking account of impact to date
	2. Commissioning	Commissioners collaborate on common priorities	Need to invest in RPC is accepted in principle	Commissioners consider RPC in service specifications & funding is available	Commissioning is aligned to the strategy for RPC	Evidence of shifts in RPC investment
	3. Workforce planning	Established local arrangements for workforce planning	Initial work on identifying RPC workforce & analysing learning needs	Key staff receive RPC training	Workforce training is evaluated & capacity gaps are addressed	Workforce receives high-quality training & supervision in RPC
LEAD	4. Partnership	Established partnerships for family priorities	Some partner dialogue on RPC but limited engagement	Identified partnership group responsible for RPC	Partnership group have a positive impact & drive local strategy	Effective partnership group, with strong performance management
	5. Leadership	Leaders champion family issues	Some local advocates for RPC	Some senior advocates for RPC	Active buy-in to RPC at operational & strategic levels	Leaders speak with one voice on RPC
	6. Community ownership	Children & families are consulted in general	Family experience of conflict is starting to influence planning	Examples of peer support & community development to reduce parental conflict	Families co-design strategy & commissioning	Communities are actively providing support to reduce parental conflict
DELIVER	7. Services and interventions	Common processes are used with vulnerable families	Frontline work on RPC is variable & depends on goodwill	RPC support is targeted at priority groups & TAF arrangements sometimes consider RPC	An agreed RPC pathway is being integrated into practice	A coherent set of evidence-based RPC programmes is in place
	8. Information & data	Local discussion on use of personal data	Commitment to information sharing on RPC	Intelligence starting to inform strategic needs analysis	Information sharing on RPC is routine and timely	Families access up-to-date and accurate service information
EVALUATE	9. Outcomes framework	Local arrangements for monitoring key child outcomes	No RPC outcomes framework, but need for this is recognised	Specific outcomes on parental conflict & the impact on children are being agreed	RPC outcomes are starting to improve & families generally have a smooth journey through services	Partnership-wide RPC outcomes are embedded in use & outcomes are improving
	10. Using & generating evidence	Evaluation recognised as important	Stakeholders reviewing available evidence on RPC	Plans for generating new evidence through local evaluation of RPC services	New evidence is generated; local leaders are skilled & confident in using it	A common evaluation framework is applied across services to reduce parental conflict

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PLAN	1. STRATEGY
	<p><i>This element focuses on the local vision, strategic approach and plan for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. It considers how well community needs are understood, how data is used, and what the shared priorities are for taking action. The strategic approach can be set out in a specific written strategy or integrated within wider family strategies.</i></p>

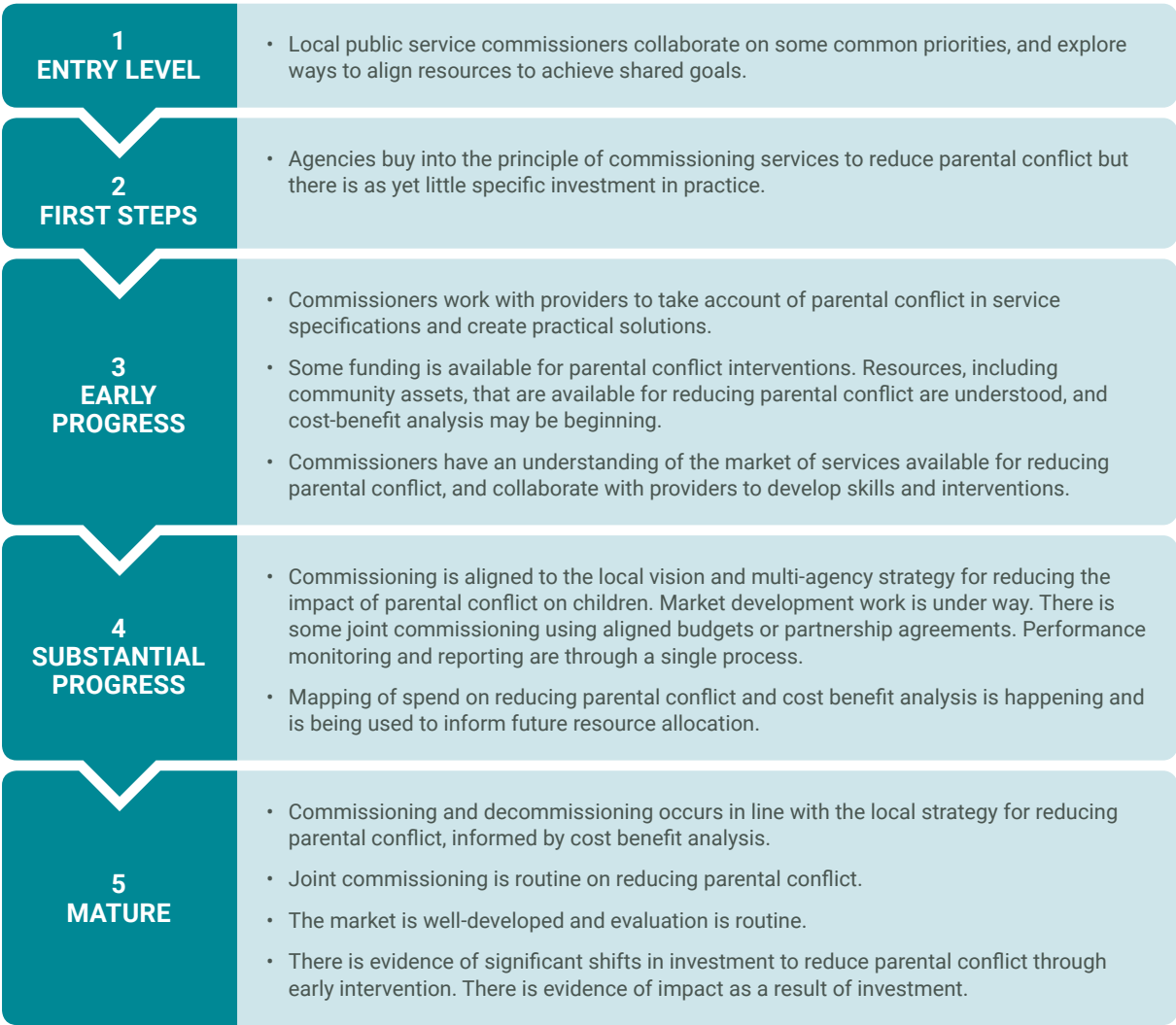


Evidence sources to support development

- **EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 2:** "What do I need to know about the impact of parental conflict on children?" and **Section 3:** "How can I measure the impact of parental conflict and understand local need?"
- Simple messages: see Animation '[Reducing parental conflict: why it matters to children & to services](#)'

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PLAN	2. COMMISSIONING
	<p><i>This element focuses on how the local area uses strategic commissioning tools to deliver the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children and collaborates to increase impact. This includes procurement processes and service specifications; market management; mapping, aligning and pooling resources; and performance monitoring and reporting.</i></p>



Evidence sources to support development

- Interparental relationship support services available in the UK: [Rapid review of evidence](#)
- [Exploring parental relationship support: A qualitative study](#) of the availability of relationship support services for families in or at risk of poverty in five case study areas.

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PLAN

3. WORKFORCE PLANNING

This element focuses on local arrangements for ensuring that the multi-agency workforce has the right skills and confidence to deliver the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. This includes analysing workforce needs across the system, and delivering capacity and capability through redesign, recruitment and training.

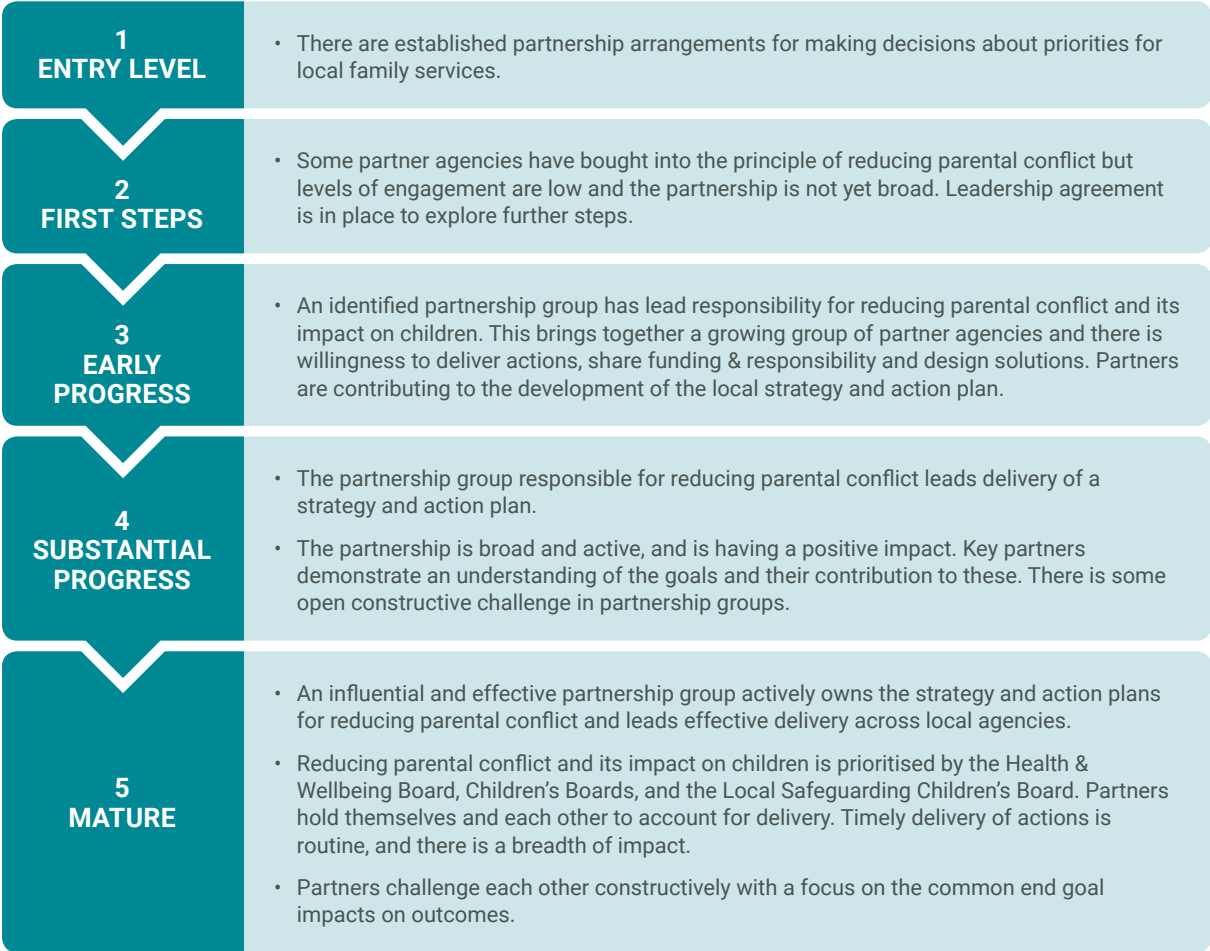


Evidence sources to support development

- [EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 2.8](#): “Which parts of the workforce can have an impact on parental conflict?” and [Section 4.1](#): “How can I mobilise my workforce?”
- Reducing Parental Conflict Hub: [‘How can I prepare my workforce?’](#) includes examples of workforce training available in the UK, learning from Local Authority pioneers and workforce training [case examples](#)

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LEAD	4. PARTNERSHIP
	<i>This element focuses on the strategic arrangements for joint working between partners, and how this drives forward delivery of the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children.</i>



Evidence sources to support development

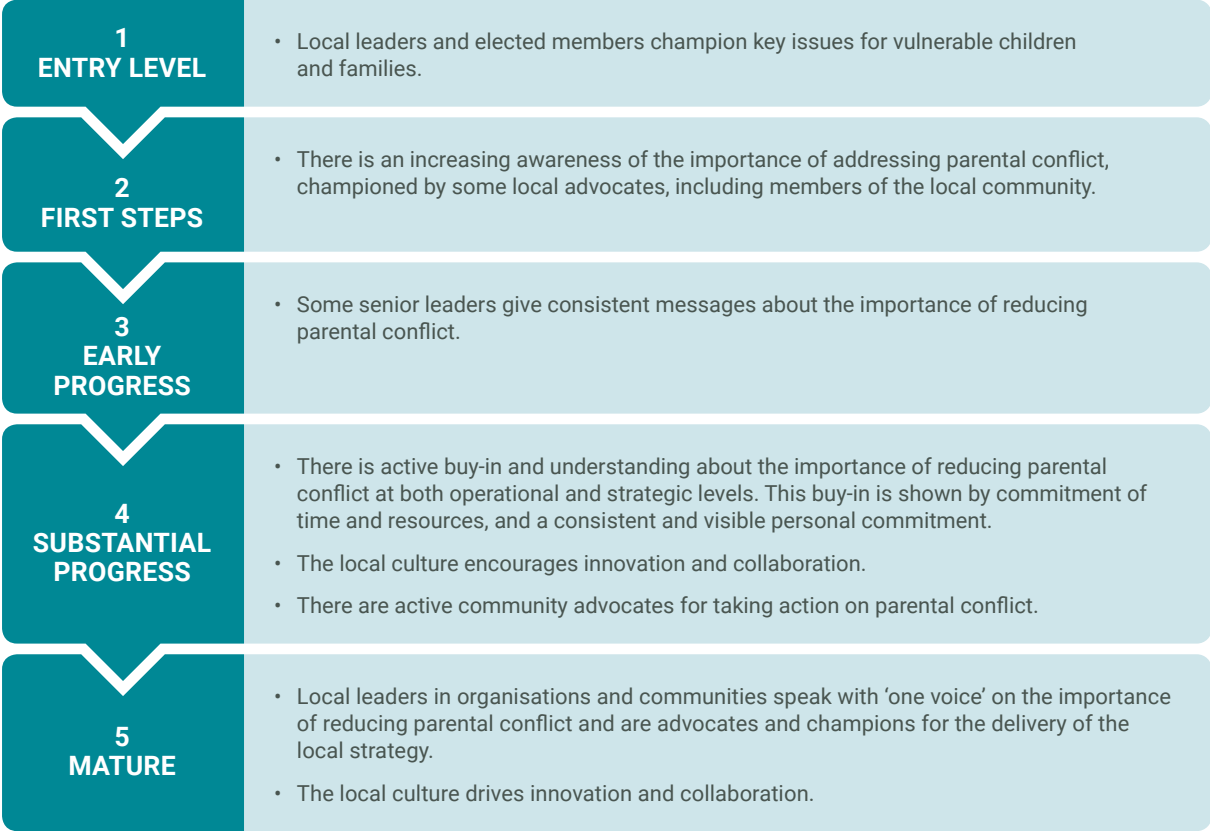
- **EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 4.6:** *“How can I persuade my stakeholders to engage on interparental relationships?”*
- Sector Briefings: **‘Why reducing parental conflict matters for the NHS’**; **‘Why reducing parental conflict matters for Local Government’**; and **‘Why reducing the impact of parental conflict matters for schools’**

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LEAD

5. LEADERSHIP

This element focuses on how this agenda is led and championed at a local level, and how leadership is distributed across the community and local organisations.



Evidence sources to support development

- Creating A Local Family Offer:** lessons from local authority pioneers on developing local systems of support to improve interparental relationships
- Simple messages: see Animation '[Reducing parental conflict: why it matters to children & to services](#)'

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6. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

LEAD

This element focuses on how families and the local community are engaged in the design and delivery of the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. It also considers the use of community assets to sustain change.

1 ENTRY LEVEL

- Children and families are often engaged through formal consultation and engagement mechanisms on family services. Their views are taken into account in strategy and service development.

2 FIRST STEPS

- The experiences of some families of conflict between parents is starting to influence local thinking and planning.

3 EARLY PROGRESS

- The views of children, young people and families directly inform strategy through consultation focused on reducing parental conflict and the impact on children. Some family champions are involved in the strategy development process.
- There are examples of peer support, community development and involvement in delivery of services to reduce parental conflict. Work is underway to map and develop capacity of communities and voluntary organisations to contribute to this agenda.

4 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

- Children, young people and parents (including fathers) are involved in the co-design of strategy, in commissioning and procurement processes, and in governance structures where decisions about reducing parental conflict are made.
- There are examples where families have successfully challenged local arrangements. Parents and community volunteers train alongside professionals and co-facilitate training.
- Peer support, community development and involvement in delivery are part of the local strategy to reduce parental conflict and make a key contribution.

5 MATURE

- Children, young people and parents (including fathers) are routinely involved in strategy, commissioning & governance relating to reducing parental conflict.
- Arrangements for collecting user experience of services relating to parental conflict are routine and embedded, and families are quality assuring services and leading change.
- Communities are actively providing support to reduce parental conflict.

Evidence sources to support development

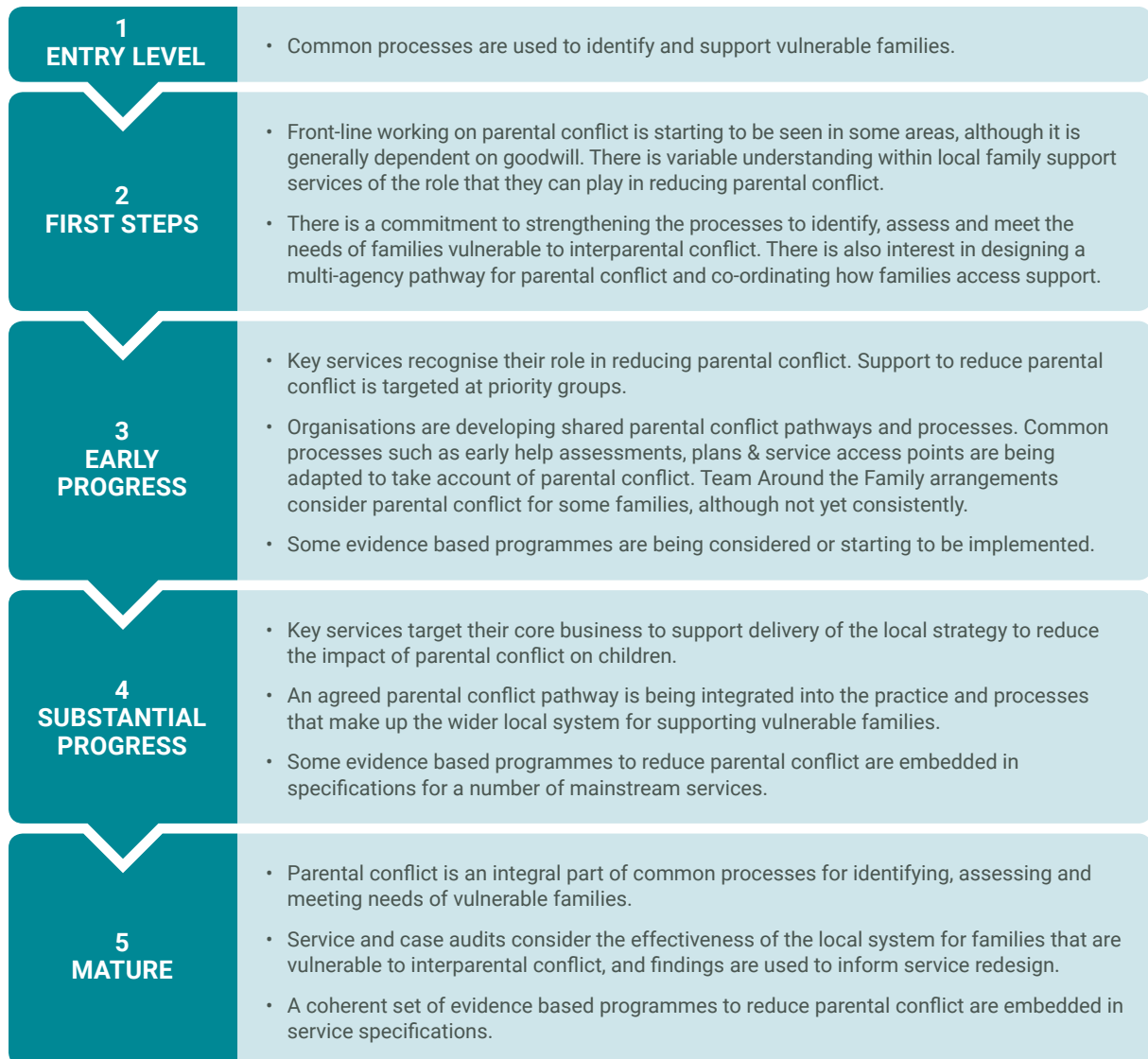
- EIF webinar: [Engaging disadvantaged families in parenting and parental conflict programmes](#)
- Evidence review [Engaging disadvantaged and vulnerable parents: Section 3.1 "Barriers to engaging parents and couples"](#) and [Section 3.3 "Strategies for recruiting parents and couples"](#)

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7. SERVICES AND INTERVENTIONS

DELIVER

This element focuses on how at an operational level local services make reducing parental conflict part of their core business, how they collaborate with each other using common systems and processes, and how evidence-based programmes are used as part of the local family offer.

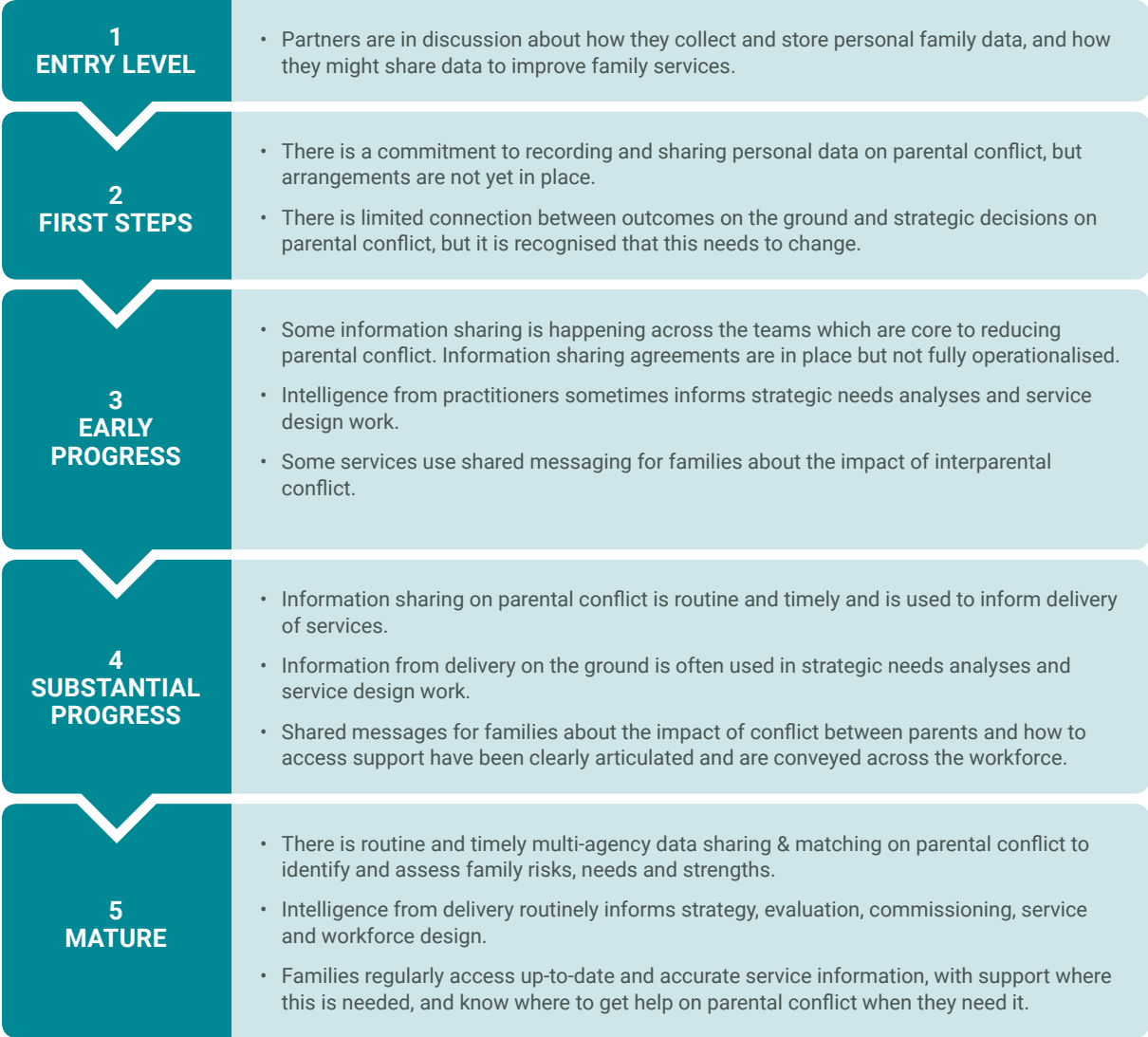


Evidence sources to support development

- [EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 4.2](#): "How can I choose evidence-based interventions to match my local needs?", [Section 4.3](#): "What interventions can reduce parental conflict & improve children outcomes?" & [Section 4.4](#): "How do I match an intervention with my local context?"
- Reducing Parental Conflict Hub: '[What interventions have been shown to improve child outcomes?](#)' and '[What relationship support services are there?](#)'

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DELIVER	8. INFORMATION AND DATA
	<p><i>This element focuses on how local services collect and share both personal data about parental relationships to support care planning, and anonymized information about service use to support targeting of support. It also considers what information is available for families about the importance of parental conflict and where they can find support.</i></p>



Evidence sources to support development

- **EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 3.3:** "How can I measure parental conflict and its impact at a family level?", covering data, evaluation and measurement

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EVALUATE

9. OUTCOMES

This element focuses on how progress in reducing the impact parental conflict on children is measured, and what the experience of support is like from the perspective of families. It includes using tools like an outcomes framework which is specific to reducing parental conflict, or integrating measures of conflict and its impact within wider child and family outcome frameworks.

1 ENTRY LEVEL

- There are co-ordinated arrangements locally for identifying and monitoring key outcomes for children and families.

2 FIRST STEPS

- There is a recognition that performance measures and outcomes relating to the impact of parental conflict on children need to be used locally.

3 EARLY PROGRESS

- Specific outcomes on parental conflict & the impact on children are being defined & agreed.
- Some families experience a smoother journey through services as a result of the focus on reducing parental conflict.

4 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

- Process and outcome measures on parental conflict and the impact on children have been agreed and data is routinely collected and reported from local family services. Validated measurement tools are used where appropriate.
- Performance against locally defined outcomes is starting to show signs of improvement against baselines. Families vulnerable to parental conflict generally have a smooth journey through support services as a result of the focus on reducing parental conflict.
- The Partnership overseeing the strategy for reducing parental conflict uses family satisfaction feedback and stories as part of its outcomes framework.

5 MATURE

- Partnership-wide outcomes and indicators on parental conflict and the impact on children are embedded in use, and families have a smooth journey through any support that they receive to reduce parental conflict. Validated measurement tools are routinely used.
- Partners have a clear view of which parts of the system are working well, & use this to inform strategy, hold service providers to account and inform service development.
- Outcomes are improving, and where performance is less good analysis is underway to understand why.

Evidence sources to support development

- [EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 3: "How can I measure the impact of parental conflict and understand local need?"](#), covering data, evaluation and measurement.
- EIF Guide: [Measuring parental conflict and its impact on child outcomes: Guidance on selecting and using valid, reliable and practical measures to evaluate interventions](#)

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EVALUATE

10. USING AND GENERATING EVIDENCE

This element focuses on how local partners find and apply external evidence on reducing parental conflict from research and practice, as well as generating robust local evidence where there is a need to innovate.

1 ENTRY LEVEL

- Evaluation is recognised as important, and partners use research and other evidence sources to inform decisions about family services.

2 FIRST STEPS

- Some local stakeholders are starting to review the latest evidence on reducing parental conflict and consider what this means for local services.

3 EARLY PROGRESS

- Robust evidence about parental conflict is being used to inform local decision-making.
- Plans are being developed for the evaluation of specific services which address parental conflict.

4 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

- Local leaders and decision-makers are confident users of evidence, able to distinguish between credible research and asserted opinion. Fidelity for evidence based programmes is monitored and reported on.
- A consistent approach to evaluation of service impact on parental conflict is a recognised goal and work on an evaluation framework is underway.
- Local evaluation findings are used to inform tactical and operational decisions as well as strategy and planning decisions.

5 MATURE

- A common evaluation framework is applied across services to reduce parental conflict which recognises different standards of evidence. Some local evaluation uses comparison groups. The consistent approach to evaluation supports experimentation and innovation.
- The local evidence base is growing and informs future service development. Other places use the learning to support their own policy decisions.

Evidence sources to support development

- [EIF Commissioner Guide, Section 3.2: "What approach should I take to evaluation?"](#)
- EIF report: '[Evaluating early intervention programmes: Six common pitfalls and how to avoid them](#)'
- EIF report: '[Evaluating early help: A guide to evaluation of complex local early help systems](#)'
- EIF Guide: '[10 Steps for evaluation success](#)'

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