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Reducing Parental Conflict Programme 2018–2022

Diary research with parents accessing interventions

August 2023

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Executive summary

Background and approach

In August 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) In-House Research Unit (IHRU) was commissioned to carry out longitudinal diary research with parents participating in seven interventions tested under the 2018–2022 Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme.

The aim of this research was to provide insight into how parents with a range of characteristics and circumstances engaged with these interventions and how participation affected family life at different stages throughout participation. The diary method did this by gathering insights in real time as parents experienced the intervention and by giving parents a variety of ways to tell their stories.

This report aims to represent the range of participant experiences and personal circumstances and provide key insights into how parents experienced the interventions tested under the 2018–2022 RPC programme.

As the research was based on parents' experiences and day-to-day lives whilst participating in the interventions, this report is not able to provide insight into mid- to long-term self-perceived impacts of the interventions.

Headline Findings

Most parents taking part in the research reported benefits and positive outcomes from their participation in RPC interventions. The extent and nature of these benefits varied: participants experienced RPC support differently, depending on their characteristics and circumstances at the point of referral and throughout their RPC journeys, including the intensity and nature of their conflict.

Participants reported progress in three key areas: interparental and family communication; goodwill between parents; and personal wellbeing and emotional regulation.

There were some elements of RPC support that participants reported as bringing almost immediate benefits to some parents and couples:

- Many intact couples reported that being given the space and time to talk and listen in couples' sessions had an immediate positive impact on their relationship and conflict.
- Parents with the greatest levels of hostility in their relationship with the other parent (often separated parents) found tools and techniques to improve emotional regulation had an almost immediate positive effect on their wellbeing.

- Some participants reported the benefits of learning parenting strategies that could be put into practice straightaway.

For some parents with complex circumstances and backgrounds, RPC support was not sufficient on its own. Some of the complex circumstances requiring additional expertise and support included mental and physical health needs, neurodiversity (of children and parents), financial stress, and legal issues relating to access. Practitioners' ability to identify these needs and signpost to relevant support was important in these cases.

Those with the highest levels of hostility in their relationship with the other parent, where a reduction in conflict was unlikely, still benefitted from the interventions through wellbeing-focused support and practical tools and techniques to manage difficult situations and stress.

Parents engaged for longer and responded better when the support felt relevant and, where possible, tailored to their circumstances and needs, with practical advice that they could implement. Tailoring to parents' needs was more easily achieved in one-to-one and couples' sessions than in group sessions.

Sometimes parents' relationship status and household situations changed during RPC support. In such cases, **the support needed to adapt to parents' changing circumstances to prevent disengagement.** For some parents, this involved a break in sessions, flexibility in the frequency of sessions or a review of the suitability of sessions. Other parents did not feel the support had adapted, which in some cases led to disengagement.

Such **adaptability was not always possible or easy to achieve.** Some parents within the study felt that the timing of RPC support was inappropriate, given their current situation; some felt that there was little of the support that was relevant to them whilst they were going through emotional or traumatic court proceedings or struggling with recommendations made by social workers and other professionals. However, RPC support was instrumental in helping them understand their situations and what was best for their children.

Key findings relating to different stages and elements of RPC delivery are covered in [Chapter 5](#), and more detailed findings can be found at the end of each chapter in the main report.

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Authors

This report was written by Anna Silk and Sophie Talbot, social researchers from the In-House Research Unit in the Department for Work and Pensions.

Glossary

Access issues	One of four core contextual themes identified in this research. Access issues in this report relate to any problems or dissatisfaction parents have regarding contact with their children, particularly for those not living with their children. This includes restrictions on access to their children, frequency of contact, practical arrangements around access, and disagreements between parents regarding access.
Child Maintenance Service (CMS) status	CMS status in this report can refer to one of three categories: 'parent with care' (PWC) is the primary carer of the child, who received payments from the other parent through DWP's Child Maintenance Service. The 'Non-Resident Parent' pays child maintenance to the other parent through the CMS. Parents who are not using the CMS to pay or receive child maintenance are defined as 'Not on CMS' and may or may not have an informal child maintenance arrangement.
Communication	One of three relationship themes identified in this research. It covers how constructive the communication is between parents, how disagreements and wider conflict are managed in communications, the nature and subject of communication between parents and how often disagreements result in arguments.
Couples' sessions	These are sessions where both parents, whether intact or separated, attended together, not in a group session format but just the couple and practitioner(s).
Deductive approach	A deductive approach to qualitative analysis involves researchers testing existing theories.
Emotional regulation	One of three relationship themes identified in this research, alongside communication and goodwill. It relates to how participants cope emotionally with parental conflict, and its effect on their wellbeing.
Financial issues	One of four core contextual themes identified in this research. In this research, it relates to any element of financial conflict, stress or hardship that had an impact on the parental relationship.

Goodwill	One of three relationship themes identified in this research, alongside Communication and Emotional Regulation. It captures the extent of positive or warm feelings in the participant's relationship with the other parent, as opposed to hostility. It also includes how much understanding there is between parents, or how much desire there is to understand the other parent. 'Warmth' is generally only relevant in intact relationships, but 'understanding' and wider positive feelings towards the other parent can apply to both separated and intact parents, and these have all been grouped under the concept of goodwill.
Household structures and networks	One of four core contextual themes identified in this research. In this research it relates to changes to household or family composition and wider networks, including new partners and, in some cases children from previous relationships.
Inductive approach	An inductive approach to qualitative analysis involves researchers generating new theories as they familiarise themselves with the data.
Intact	Intact refers to couples who are in a relationship at the point of referral to, or during, RPC interventions.
Mental and physical health	One of four core contextual themes identified in this research. Mental and physical ill health and other diagnosable conditions had a continuous impact on the delivery of, and engagement with, interventions. Neurodiversity was also a context which affected communication and mutual understanding in relationships, with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), both in parents and in children, mentioned by around half of the diary research participants.
Narrative analysis	Narrative analysis is an analytical method whereby researchers use interpretation to understand participant stories told within the context of research or everyday life.
Proof of Concept	Evidence, deriving from a pilot project, which demonstrates that a design concept or business proposal is feasible.
RPC interventions	The RPC programme aimed to improve the UK evidence base on parental conflict by testing seven interventions for parents in conflict. Interventions were

of either a moderate or high intensity. Parents were allocated to the interventions according to need and the level of conflict in their relationship.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of data analysis. It involves identification of themes and patterns of meaning repeated within the research.

Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CMS	Child Maintenance Service
CPA	Contract Package Area
DA	Domestic Abuse
DV	Domestic Violence
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EIF	Early Intervention Foundation (now part of Foundations, the What Works Centre for Children & Families)
IFDA	Income, Families and Disadvantage Analysis Division
IHRU	In-House Research Unit
RPC	Reducing Parental Conflict

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter explains the background to the project and provides an overview of the research methodology.

1. Introduction

In 2015, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) started working with a small group of local authorities to find ways of addressing parental conflict as part of the Local Family Offer pilots. The lessons learned from these pilots informed the development of the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme, which was announced in 2017 as part of ‘Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families’ (Department for Work and Pensions, 2017), also identifying parental conflict as an indicator of disadvantage, and linking relationship distress to worklessness and poor later life outcomes for children.

The RPC programme was backed by up to £50 million until March 2022. The programme encouraged local authorities across England to integrate services and approaches which address parental conflict into their local provision for families.

Evidence shows that children, no matter what age, who frequently observe intense, poorly resolved interparental conflict, are at an elevated risk for negative outcomes (Acquah, D., Sellers, R., Stock, L. & Harold, G, 2017). The 2018–22 RPC programme aimed to reduce the damage that parental conflict (that is not domestic abuse) causes to children through the provision of evidence-based parental conflict interventions (see Harold, G., Acquah, D., Sellers, R. & Chowdry, H., 2016). Between 2019 and 2022, eight interventions¹ were selected to be tested in four locations across England. Some of these interventions had good evidence to support their efficacy in the UK, but not necessarily for all family types or for different delivery methods (see Jones, K. and others, 2007; Asen, E. & Fonagy, P., 2012). Others had been successful internationally (see Stallman, H. M. & Sanders, M. R., 2007; Dishion, T. and others, 2008).

To help build UK-based evidence, DWP started evaluating the RPC programme in 2019, including exploring parents’ experiences of the interventions and their effects on interparental relationships and the behaviour and mental health of the children in participating families.

See the [interim evaluation reports](#) for more details.

¹ See EIF definitions of RPC interventions at [Face-to-face support interventions for reducing parental conflict](#)

In August 2021, DWP's In-House Research Unit (IHRU) was commissioned to carry out longitudinal diary research with RPC participants across seven of the interventions.² This report aims to represent the diversity of diary participant experiences and contexts, to describe parent characteristics and circumstances that affect engagement and outcomes, and to explore the reasons behind intervention attrition. The intention is to show what the interventions did under the 2018–22 programme and what they could do in future to maximise parent engagement and outcomes.

For more information on the intervention delivery designs, please see section 3 of the annexe, and other research reports covering the evaluation of the 2018–22 RPC programme.

² One of the selected interventions did not receive any referrals so the evaluation was limited to the seven interventions that did.

Chapter 2: Research aims

This chapter sets out the overall research aims and the key research questions to be answered.

2. Research

2.1 Overall research aims

The RPC Diary Research project provided a unique opportunity to obtain evidence from parents while they were taking part in interventions. Participants uploaded what they chose to share via text, photo with caption, or video.

This research aimed to:

- Provide insight into how parents engaged with the interventions at different stages throughout participation, and the progress they made in relation to the conflict they were experiencing.
- Deliver a better understanding of the interplay between the contexts involved in parental conflict and parents' experiences of RPC support.
- Deliver a greater understanding of engagement and drop-out: what led to disengagement, whether it was considered or unplanned, whether there was anything that could have been done to ensure continued participation.
- Deliver insightful narratives to complement the wider RPC evaluation.

2.2 Research questions

To meet these aims, the research responded to the following questions:

- How did parents engage with the RPC interventions, at different stages throughout participation?
- What contextual factors affected parents' experience of, and engagement with, RPC interventions, and how did these help or hinder participation?
- What led up to disengagement, and was there anything that could have been done to support continued engagement for parents?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods used throughout the diary research, including recruitment, sampling, data collection and analysis.

3. Methods

3.1 Recruitment

Participants were recruited in two cohorts, the first from November 2021, and the second from February 2022. This gave researchers access to a larger pool of potential research participants who were just starting on their RPC intervention, as participants were referred to interventions on a rolling basis.

A multi-step recruitment process including an initial telephone call, follow-up information email and follow-up call was used to recruit participants and schedule interviews. In total, there were 45 participants in this research, with 45 initial interviews, 33 final interviews and 147 tasks completed on the diary app by 29 participants. Twelve research participants dropped out of the research before making diary entries and/or completing the final interview. It was not possible to reliably estimate the number of intervention non-completers amongst the sample, as often participants dropped out of the research without warning and with no further contact. However, some final interviews were conducted with non-completers.

3.2 Sampling

Several participant characteristics were considered during recruitment, including intervention type, gender, ethnicity, referral type (individual or with partner) and Child Maintenance Service (CMS) status (whether receiving or paying child maintenance through CMS). The sample design did not aim to be representative across these characteristics but did aim to ensure representation across these variables during the recruitment process, by monitoring numbers as participants were recruited and prioritising some characteristics which were underrepresented in the sample. Given the limited sample available, it was sometimes necessary to recruit people a few sessions into their RPC journey and accept lower proportions of some characteristics in the sample (e.g. male participants).

The 45 research participants were drawn from the three providers responsible for intervention delivery, in proportions similar to each provider's share of referrals, with almost half coming from Tavistock Relationships, a third coming from Twin Training and the remainder coming from Relate. The main sampling consideration was ensuring that the research included parents participating in all seven of the interventions tested. Some details on the spread of sample characteristics are given

in section 2.1 in the annexe. The information has been restricted to reduce the likelihood of identifying individuals.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Data collection methods

This research employed a mixed-method approach to capture participants' experience at different stages in their RPC journey. This approach was taken to ensure parents' recollection of events and situations was as accurate as possible and grounded in the context of what was happening in their lives at the time, both in terms of the conflict, and more widely. Data collection was carried out in three stages:

- an initial hour-long telephone interview at or near the start of each participant's time on the RPC intervention, capturing participants' experience of parental conflict up to the point at which they were referred onto the intervention, and their expectations for the RPC support
- uploads made to a mobile diary app, where participants answered up to ten fortnightly prompts over the course of their time on the intervention
- a final hour-long telephone interview at the end of the intervention, designed to capture participants' RPC experience and any outcomes at the end of their time on the intervention

The diary app was procured from Indeemo Ltd. and allowed participants to upload diary entries using photo, video or text. This project will act as a proof of concept for the use of diary methods in future DWP research.

3.3.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork took place between November 2021 and August 2022. Telephone interviews were conducted by DWP social researchers with a notetaker; they were not recorded.

Interviews followed a semi-structured topic guide for the initial interview, and an individually tailored semi-structured topic guide for the final interview, which was carried out at the end of the participant's time on the intervention, with some of the questions informed by their initial interview and diary entries.

Diary entries were made in response to fortnightly prompts sent to participants via the mobile app from the week they started on the research until the end of their intervention support. Prompts were designed to be broad and open, to ensure that diary entries reflected what was most pertinent to individuals. The same prompts were used for all, but researchers responded to participants with tailored clarification questions via the app where appropriate. Researchers were assigned to individual participants throughout the project, with the same researcher conducting both interviews and engaging with the participant through the diary app. This encouraged consistency, rapport and trust. Uploads to the diary app were monitored every weekday, and transcription of videos was automated via Amazon Web

Services/Microsoft Azure and then checked and amended as appropriate by researchers.

3.4 Analysis approach

The diary research analysis was informed by thematic and narrative analysis approaches, allowing cross-sectional analysis to establish key themes, and longitudinal analysis to represent participant experience in context over time.

3.4.1 Coding and thematic development

See section 4.3 in the annexe for a description of how the coding and thematic scheme was developed. The final coding framework that was developed for the second stage of analysis is also included. The conceptual and contextual themes form the basis of this report and are described in the following subsections.

3.4.2 Concepts used in analysis

Longitudinal findings in Chapter 4 and findings on session content and delivery in Chapter 5 are divided into three different, but linked, areas that RPC support can be broadly grouped under: communication, goodwill and emotional regulation. These terms were assigned by the research team and are based on the aspects of parental and family relationships that RPC interventions can influence. For more detail on the analytical process, see section 3.4.1. The concepts are defined as follows:

- **Communication:** How constructive the communication is between parents, how disagreements and wider conflict are managed in communications, the nature and subject of communication between parents and how often disagreements result in arguments. Improvements in communication between parents was often closely linked to improvements in goodwill, and vice versa.
- **Goodwill:** An umbrella term used to capture the extent of positive or warm feelings in the participant's relationship with the other parent, as opposed to hostility. It also includes how much understanding there is between parents, or how much desire there is to understand the other parent. 'Warmth' is generally only relevant in intact relationships, but 'understanding' and wider positive feelings towards the other parent can apply to both separated and intact parents, and these have all been grouped under the concept of goodwill.
- **Emotional regulation:** How participants cope emotionally with parental conflict, and its effect on their wellbeing. Intervention support aimed at improving wellbeing included practical tools and techniques, and improvement in this area was often linked to improvements in the other areas of communication and goodwill. However, support related to emotional regulation was often particularly important for participants in more hostile relationships with the other parent, where there was little opportunity for improvements in communication and goodwill.

In the analysis, the concept of goodwill was found to be particularly influential on participants' experiences of RPC support, and on outcomes. Sometimes the level of goodwill, as opposed to hostility, in a participant's relationship with the other parent had as much, if not more, influence on participant experience and outcomes than their relationship status (intact or separated). Throughout the report, findings highlight differences between levels of parental goodwill or hostility at the beginning of the intervention. Participant relationships were judged as relatively more or less hostile by researchers based on the evidence gathered at the first interview, but these judgements were by nature subjective.

Similarly, surveys of parents who completed RPC interventions as part of the wider evaluation³ research, found that the three most useful things taken from sessions were (1) How to communicate with a partner/ex-partner; (2) seeing things from the perspective of others; and (3) How to handle conflict/stressful situations. These skills broadly correspond to the concepts of communication, goodwill and emotional regulation set out in this report.

3.4.3 Contextual themes

Presented below are four principal contextual themes identified in the diary analysis, which inform the narrative throughout the report (in the main body of text and in separate 'Focus on' boxes).

- **Household structures and networks:** Changes to household or family composition and wider networks, including new partners and, in some cases, children from previous relationships, influenced the nature of conflict and had implications for RPC support. Distrust of – or poor communication about – new partners often led to escalation of conflict.
- **Access issues:** Child access issues were common amongst separated parents across interventions. Intact couples also sometimes felt there was a poor distribution of childcare, which increased conflict levels.
- **Financial issues:** For many participants, financial stress and distrust about finances were significant contributors to conflict and its escalation.
- **Mental and physical health:** Mental health, physical health and other diagnosable conditions had a continuous impact on the delivery of, and engagement with, interventions. Mental ill health such as depression and anxiety were common in participants. Neurodiversity was also a context which influenced communication and mutual understanding in relationships, with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), both in parents and in children, mentioned by around half of the diary research participants.

³ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

3.5 Methodological limitations

This research is designed to give rich detail and context to participants' experiences of RPC support. While the research aimed to include a range of participant types and experience, findings cannot be generalised to the wider RPC population.

Parents were contacted by telephone and email and the sample was selected based on availability and willingness to engage in the research. The sample likely includes parents more engaged with the support and research, and therefore more receptive to the benefits and less likely to disengage with support. This potentially skews findings relating to factors that influence (dis)engagement with interventions.

Recruitment was conducted with two cohorts, the first beginning in November 2021 and the second in February 2022. Christmas is a busy period for many people, and delays in referral, session start dates and availability of sessions may have had an impact on the findings. In addition, all participants recruited at this stage of the RPC programme must have completed sessions by July 2022, which will have affected the feasibility of extending or rescheduling sessions.

Finally, there is a significant risk that the parents included in this study were subject to the Hawthorne Effect: what they shared with researchers and how they shared it was likely to be influenced by their knowledge that they were being observed. To minimise this effect as far as possible, trust and rapport was built by assigning a single researcher to each participant, being responsive to diary entries, and providing reassurances about anonymity and the voluntary nature of the research. It should also be noted that in the majority of cases researchers only spoke to one half of any couple (intact or separated) on an RPC intervention, and therefore findings are based almost exclusively on the perspective of the parent taking part in the research.

It is important to recognise the above, but also to acknowledge that mitigating measures were taken in designing, implementing and quality assuring the research and findings presented in the report.

3.6 Reporting conventions

Interview quotations in this report were collected by notetakers. Where quotations have been included, these are verbatim, with any missed parts identified with [...]. The [...] convention is also used to omit parts of longer quotes that do not relate to the point being made in the report.

Quotations from diary entries are included in round-cornered boxes, and mainly come from typed text entries (unless indicated that they are transcribed from a video entry). To preserve the authenticity of typed diary entries, they have been reproduced exactly as typed, including any spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors. Errors which may otherwise impact understanding are indicated with the convention [sic].

Any personally identifiable data has been redacted to preserve anonymity of participants and protect confidentiality.

Chapter 4: Parents' relationship journeys

This chapter gives an overview of participating parents' conflict and wider family relationships at the start of their RPC journey, and how that changed throughout their experience of RPC support. The specific elements of the support that prompted positive changes are not covered in detail in this section; this is covered in [Chapter 5](#).

4. Parent journeys: conflict over time

4.1 Communication over time

This section describes the nature of communication between participants and the other parent, and within families, at different points in their RPC journeys.

4.1.1 Arguments and hostile communications: start of journey

Pre-intervention and in the early days of support, respondents talked about arguments arising mainly during face-to-face interactions with the other parent, particularly where that contact was frequent (e.g. where they were still in an intact relationship). Those who were separated talked about the arguments that had happened while they were still together that had contributed to the breakup.

“Every time I tried to have a conversation about it he felt I was picking on him.”

Female, Intact

Frequently, arguments would lead to ineffective communication, misunderstandings, or even complete communication breakdown.

Arguments could arise for a variety of reasons, from failures to understand the other's point of view and miscommunications linked to that, to arguments concerning differences in opinion over larger issues such as parenting approaches and family responsibilities.

“He makes a really big deal out of everything [...] say something a million times until it's done.”

Female, Intact

Sometimes, the stress of family life and coping with parenting was cited as a source of arguments. Some participants argued with their partners due to resentment over perceived unequal sharing of household and childcare responsibilities. Sometimes

financial stresses and disagreements fed the conflict (see 'Focus on: financial issues' box at the end of this section).

“A lot [of disagreements]: whether we should be really strict with the children, like when they go to sleep, where to go when we have free time [...] then we end up not going anywhere.”

Female, Intact

Some separated parents still experienced arguments, usually in the form of tense exchanges or hostile remarks at handover, or disputes over email, text or telephone about parenting approaches and arrangements.

“I fear her ringing me because I know she’s just going to shout and scream at me [...] I want things to settle down now.”

Male, Separated

Verbal and (historical) physical abuse⁴ towards the participant were mentioned in a minority of cases, as well as general aggression not directed at individuals. Sometimes participants reported that their ex-partners continued to use hurtful language and repeatedly bring up past issues or gripes in their interactions with them.

⁴ Mentions of Domestic Abuse (DA) and Domestic Violence (DV) in this research refer to historical incidents before RPC intervention. Parents who were experiencing DA/DV at the time of referral/participation should have been screened out as part of the referral process and offered alternative support.

Focus on: Financial issues

Shared debts causing or exacerbating conflict

Debts accrued during a relationship often had a considerable impact, either as a primary cause of conflict or by exacerbating existing conflict between parents, including after separation. When both parents shared a mortgage, financial contract, or joint account, this was regularly an area of tension.

“Financially she would try and get every penny out of me [...] she’d racked up [...] debts behind my back [...] every few months she’d stick the knife in [...] passing some debt across to me [...] it was non-stop.”

Male, Separated

Particularly important was when children picked up on or commented on financial disputes between separating or separated couples. The involvement of professionals and associated delays sometimes further increased the conflict, leading to overtly hostile communications.

In extreme cases, loss of trust over financial issues could have lasting damage to a relationship. This was difficult to repair, even with RPC support. See the case study in section 4.1.3.

4.1.2 Arguments and hostile communications: mid–end of journey

“Last week my partner & I were discussing an issue that my partner was upset about. I was becoming defensive [...] but I acknowledged to myself what was happening and made the decision to accept the validity in my partner's experience and apologise to him which in turn, helped him to feel safe/heard and so we were able to discuss both of our experiences without it escalating into a stressful argument.”

Female, Intact, **Diary Entry**

Parents who started their RPC journey with more goodwill towards the other parent frequently reported reduced arguments by the end of their sessions, which were often replaced with more constructive communication. Intact participants were almost all very positive about their improved conflict resolution with their partner (and children) and their expectations for the future. Many said that they and their partners understood each other's perspective better by this time and had become more aware of their own behaviours and emotions, which helped them to approach disagreements differently, for example, by taking time out in a way that helped cool tempers or by making the effort to resolve conflict face-to-face rather than by text, where meanings can be misconstrued.

Participants who were separated or had started sessions with more hostility in their relationship with the other parent reported that being given the chance in sessions to air differences and have constructive discussions had led to fewer arguments outside

of sessions, although not all believed that this improvement would necessarily continue. Similarly, other RPC evaluation research⁵ found modest improvements in some areas for separated parents (e.g. managing contact with the other parent), but that over time old patterns of behaviour persisted.

“I don’t think it’ll continue [...] we’re getting on and talking and stuff [...] not quite there yet but things are better than they were.”

Female, Separated

For separated parents with the most hostile relationships with the other parent, it is less relevant to think about improved communications in terms of reduced arguments, as often there was little to no communication between parents in this category. There was little evidence of any reduction in hostile communications amongst those directly in contact. One or two of these parents reported making efforts not to react to negative communications from the other parent, but little progress had been made overall.

4.1.3 Communication breakdown: start of journey

For intact couples, communication breakdown often involved parents ignoring each other, for example, walking away and using silence to diffuse tension, or avoiding discussing important issues entirely to prevent arguments, which led to a build-up of resentment and unresolved issues. Sometimes the ignoring or lack of communication was the result of busy lives and not having or not making enough time for each other.

“To be honest with you we just didn’t talk so it was easier [...] every time we would try to talk it would end up in a disagreement.”

Female, Intact

Lack of communication could lead to further misunderstandings and hostility, and a vicious circle. While in most cases for intact couples this type of conflict was not linked to one single cause or event, Case Study A in this section gives an example where communication breakdown between an intact couple (both taking part in the research) was the result of a serious breach of trust.

For separated parents, communication breakdown involved unresponsiveness to texts or other modes of contact necessary for arranging childcare and keeping each other informed about important child-related issues. In some cases, it involved perceived undermining or sabotaging of one parent’s intentions, for example, by failing to engage or cooperate with requests for flexibility in childcare arrangements, and perceptions that the other parent was trying to exert control through their lack of cooperation.

“Doesn’t read her emails [...] she doesn’t charge it [her mobile], it’s never on [...] everyone says how difficult it was to get hold of her [e.g. school].”

Male, Separated

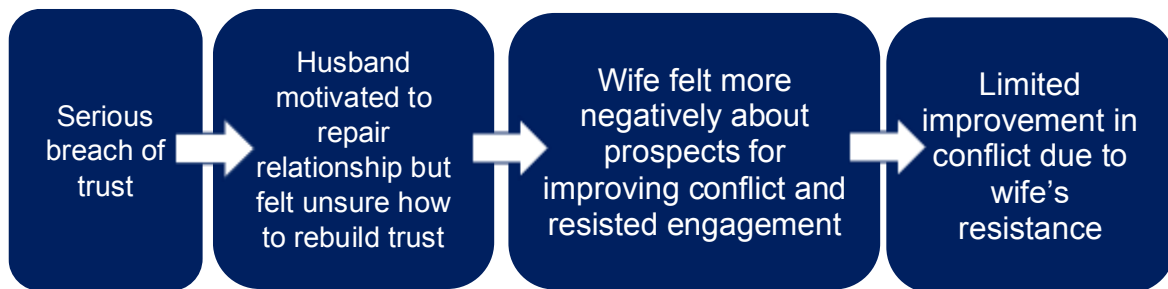
⁵ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

A few separated parents suspected that new partners were unhappy with continued contact between them and the other parent and were the cause of reduced communication.

In some cases, a mediator (professional or family member) was involved in all communications where direct communication between participants was not possible or desirable. Where family members were involved, this was not always seen as an effective solution.

Case Study A: Breach of trust

Following both parents' perspectives on their relationship



Where conflict resulted from a serious breach of trust, it could be a challenge for RPC support to help couples rediscover the warmth and goodwill in their relationship or find motivation to improve the situation.

At the beginning of intervention sessions...

One husband and wife (Couple A) were struggling with the effects of the husband's financial mismanagement and concealment of this. This resulted in an almost complete breakdown of trust and lack of communication over an extended period.

"I found out that we had no money [...] all of our savings had been completely depleted. [Husband] hadn't spoken to me about any of this [...] that for me was just... just such a blow in terms of my trust and belief in my husband." – Wife

During intervention sessions...

There was little disagreement between the parents as to the source and nature of the conflict. The key differences were their priorities, motivation to improve their relationship, and their descriptions of their experience of the intervention.

For the wife, most of the support was focused around managing wider family stresses and conflict. Less was mentioned about how the support helped her and her husband communicate better and rebuild their relationship. For the husband, the focus was less on the wider family and mainly on his relationship with his wife; the main benefit of sessions for him was the practitioner's fairness in ensuring both parents had their say. However, by his account, the wife refused to fully open up or listen to his perspective during sessions.

At the end of intervention sessions ...

Some tentative progress had been made in the parental relationship, mainly as a result of the wife beginning to communicate more outside of sessions. The husband felt that ultimately their relationship would depend on their financial situation, which was preventing any significant progress at the time:

"I can only assume [relationship would improve] when our finances are in a much healthier state. It's a shame, but that's the reality of it." – Husband

4.1.4 Communication breakdown: mid–end of journey

“We have been sitting down with out [sic] our phones in our hands and just talked thing[s] out.”

Male, Intact, **Diary Entry**

Intact participants who were motivated to improve their relationship often reported that taking the conscious decision to spend more time together was helping them to reconnect and communicate with each other.

Some participants reported that they were taking time out from face-to-face disagreements, or waiting before responding to texts, as a positive move to avoid arguments – an example of how taking time out not speaking to each other can, for a short while, be a positive move.

“I will move away and calm down before I started to talk and in a calmer voice.”

Female, Intact

It was rare for a parent starting their journey with some feelings of goodwill or motivation to improve their relationship to report no improvements following experience of RPC support or a worsening of the situation.

During and following sessions, separated participants often talked about keeping communication functional, for example, about childcare practicalities. Some participants talked about being more assertive with the other parent, and a few said how they now discussed issues with the other parent, having learned from the sessions that ‘bottling things up’ can make matters worse. One mentioned that the other parent was more responsive to texts.

“If I message him or something he’d just like completely ignore it [...] annoyed me a lot because it’s about our daughter [...] school and stuff [...] now he does message back.”

Female, Separated

One separated parent who was highly motivated to make her relationship work with the other parent and spend time together as a family described how the RPC practitioner had supported them to discuss issues and share feelings. Following the intervention, she was hopeful that they might get back together – see Case Study B in this section.

A couple of separated parents talked about making steps to open up communication, during sessions or outside of them, to discuss parenting approaches, with negative responses from the other parent.

“I also tried to have a conversation about them going to bed too late [...] He said, ‘when they are with me, it is up to me what to do with them as they are in my care’.”

Female, Separated

Separated parents coming from highly hostile relationships rarely reported significant improvements in their communication with the other parent. Those who communicated through a mediator (either professional, family member or friend) at the start were often still using this method at the time of the final interview.

One participant said that the intervention did not help with communication because their sessions were separate, and he felt they needed to be in the same room with a facilitator for any progress to be made.

“That’s the number one issue [...] There’s no communication element – no part of the course that allowed me and [ex-partner] to sit down together and discuss our co-parenting [...] If the courses don’t support us to communicate then we’ll do nothing.”

Male, Separated

However, there was modest improvement for some separated parents in the most hostile relationships with the other parent: one father made the distinction between functional communication about the children (which they were managing), and more friendly conversation, which was less successful.

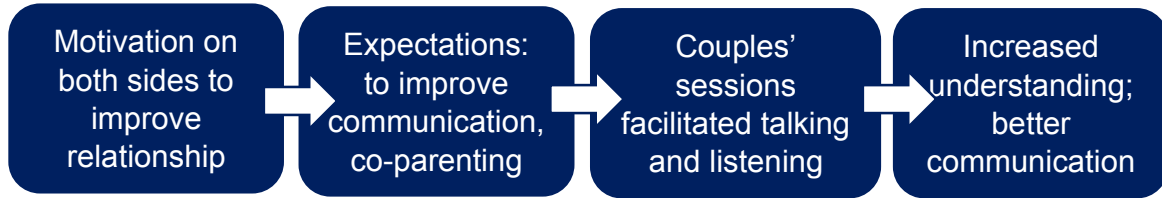
“My current level of communication with Mum is good in respect of sharing essential communications, such as dietary information for our children, all other communication is extremely difficult.”

Male, Separated, **diary entry**

Another father used a technique suggested in the sessions involving sharing photos and achievements of his children with the other parent as an alternative to more verbal communication, with some success.

Case Study B: Communication over time

Facilitating conversations in couples' sessions and beyond



At the beginning of intervention sessions...

Participant B started her sessions about a year after separating from her husband. They shared three young children, who lived with her, but her husband spent a lot of time at the house.

Going into sessions, the main challenges Participant B and her husband faced related to communication and supporting each other. ***“[I felt] completely let down by him, there was just so much [...] the struggles of having young children.”*** They did not discuss conflict or important issues, which led to frustrations and arguments. However, there were still positive feelings between them: ***“We still get on, at the weekend we do things together as a family [...] We are trying to work out how we can get over our differences and kind of come back together.”***

During intervention sessions...

Participant B and her husband took part in couples' sessions. At the start, she didn't feel she needed to change: ***“He's changed a lot [...] a lot more present with the children. But he thinks I haven't changed, but why should I?”*** However, she soon felt the benefit of sitting down with her husband, sharing her worries and concerns, and hearing his point of view. She found it particularly helpful to have an impartial mediator, who helped them see each other's perspective, problem-solve, and acknowledge the positives: ***“[Practitioner] taught us to [...] tell each other the positive things [...] don't concentrate on the negatives.”*** ***“It helped us sitting in front of somebody because if you say it in front of someone else it's true [...] it makes you accountable for your actions.”***

At the end of intervention sessions...

Towards the end of the sessions, Participant B came to understand and acknowledge her own role in the conflict and to make changes to her own behaviour and approach to communication: ***“Before going into these sessions, I kind of felt with all honesty that [husband] was the problem and I was frustrated at him [...] and I really felt like it was him in the wrong and I know that I'm not always a perfect person [...] he is who he is and I have to try and just concentrate on the positives.”*** The participant hoped to get back together with her husband in the future.

4.1.5 Children and family communication: start of journey

Sometimes, the main conflict was between one or both parents and their children, particularly where the children were in their teens. Parents made general mention of their teenagers having a 'bad attitude', of school and friendship problems which affected their mood and engagement with the family, and of sibling rivalry and pushing of boundaries. Many of these problems reflected common adolescent behaviour, but sometimes parents mentioned additional challenges which caused frequent disruption in the family home.

Other parents believed conflict resulted from misunderstanding and miscommunication stemming from neurodiverse behaviour in their child, usually where a participant felt that the other parent did not understand the child's condition or handle it appropriately, creating tension and arguments in the household. Sometimes the participant felt that neurodiversity in the other parent caused communication challenges between them and their children.

"I say 'pick your battles' [with] my daughter [...] who can argue and can get physical with me [...] Then he gets involved and I can't win. It's just hard."

Female, Intact

Around half of diary research participants mentioned suspected or diagnosed neurodiversity in their children and/or one or both parents, in all cases citing this as having an impact on conflict.

Where the main conflict was between parents (most cases in the diary sample), participants talked about the impact of this on their children. While many parents said that they made a special effort not to argue in front of their children, some intact parents reported that their children had started to imitate their or the other parent's negative communication, becoming argumentative and/or abrasive, and getting involved in the parents' arguments.

"I guess like sometimes I hear her say things that [husband] says [...] that I say [...] I know she's aware of it and I know it affects her."

Female, Intact

Parents with highly hostile relationships often talked about children taking sides, or the other parent influencing the child's opinions of them, by either purposefully or thoughtlessly criticising the other parent in front of the child.

"I said to the kids if you ever want to call Daddy you can use my phone [...] he said, 'is that your mother, I don't want to talk if she's in the room because she does my head in'."

Female, Separated

A few parents reported that their children were fearful or upset about the overt conflict between parents.

“[Son] was frightened because I shout. When me and [partner] have our rows I am the bad guy because I shout the loudest. [...] did not realise how scared [son] was.”

Male, Separated

4.1.6 Children and family communication: mid–end of journey

Participants reported varying degrees of improvement in communication with their children and as a family, during and at the end of their time on the intervention. This involved both increased understanding on their children’s part due to the constructive conversations that parents were having with them about the conflict, and effort on the parents’ part to communicate with their children and resolve conflict in a calmer way.

“The house is becoming a happier home. Communication is increasing more between the children and us as parents but also we are beginning to reconnect again.”

Female, Intact

Many talked about techniques learned in the sessions for improving communication with their children, and how to approach discipline. See Case Study C in this section for an example of how one family applied such techniques, with positive results, and section 5.2.1 for more detail on the techniques parents learned and applied.

Sometimes improving family communication involved self-reflection on the part of the participant, on how they reacted to their children’s behaviour and how this could be negatively impacting on the situation.

“My daughter called [son] a dog and it really upset him. So they started arguing. I started yelling and tried to punish both of them. I sent them both to their rooms, but then I went to a different room and took a step back. [...] I thought, ‘hang on a minute, if these were someone else’s children, what would my reaction be to them being yelled at?’ I thought, ‘how would I speak to a stranger?’ So it was good because I reflected on what I had learnt.”

Female, Intact

Others mentioned how they were making a greater effort not to talk negatively about the other parent or argue in front of the children and, where relationships had improved between parents, a few reported that their children were beginning to pick up on the improved communication and atmosphere between their parents, making the children calmer and happier in turn.

“[Daughter] seems a lot calmer going to Dad’s now [...] picked up on the fact that everyone is getting along better.”

Female, Separated

Some parents talked about having greater confidence communicating their expectations regarding behaviour with their children.

Few separated participants with highly hostile relationships with the other parent thought that communication with, or impact of conflict on, their child had improved,

which suggests a link between the level of parental conflict and conflict between parent and child. For others, there was no evidence that this had changed by the end of their time on the intervention.

“I don’t think it really has [changed]. If he’s got anything to say, he’ll still say it regardless of if it’s appropriate or not [...] I say to him I’m not talking about it. If he wants to make a point, he’ll make it, regardless.”

Female, Separated

One parent in a very hostile relationship mentioned that her relationship with her children had improved greatly since the separation, as the relationship between the children and the other parent had been difficult while he was still in the house.

“We’re [participant and children] definitely closer, the house is so much happier. [I] was so worried about the impact [of divorce] on the children, but actually they’re so much happier. We’re not arguing and I do think they had issues with their relationship with their dad.”

Female, Separated

The interventions supported understanding and co-operation for some parents experiencing neurodiversity, either in themselves or their children. For others, the content and delivery of the course felt untailored to suit specific needs. For one parent who did not attend with her ex-partner, the course content led to worries over potential misinterpretation by the other parent, particularly around the importance of routine across both households.

“The special needs children are more complicated. They need more support. [...] the whole course was based on families with children with no additional needs.”

Female, Separated

Case Study C: Family communication

Applying parenting techniques for a calmer household



At the beginning of intervention sessions...

Participant C and his wife had four children, from primary age to teenagers. When family communications became challenging due to a combination of sibling rivalry and child behavioural issues, this exacerbated existing parental conflict, and Participant C asked their early help worker for support. The early help worker recommended RPC sessions.

Communication breakdown was a key aspect of the conflict. The teenagers would argue with each other and with their parents but refused to communicate constructively or work to resolve issues.

During intervention sessions...

The practitioner took time to tailor sessions to support both parents with their family communication challenges. This involved introducing rules and consequences, holding family meetings where all family members were heard, and teaching the importance of parents presenting a united front: ***“Trying to teach our two youngest boys to have a better relationship with each other rather than fighting and arguing. We’ve used some of the strategies taught on the course like calling a family meeting to introduce rules and let them vent how they are making each other feel.”*** – diary entry

“In the last couple of weeks we have had a few situations with our oldest child pushing the boundaries. [...] Both me and [Mum] have spoken to him separately and together. I think it shows a bit of solidarity between both of us as he tries to play us against each other at times. Using some of the tools/tips given in the session’s [sic] we’ve all got a better understanding to communicate effectively.” – diary entry

Participant C and his partner also learned about the importance of effective, face-to-face communication between themselves, to resolve conflict and help with co-parenting decisions.

At the end of intervention sessions...

The outcomes of these strategies were positive: “Everything seems to be getting better [...] it’s where it needs to be if that makes sense [...] happy vibe in the house, relationship is happy.”

4.2 Goodwill over time

This section describes participants' feelings towards the other parent – in terms of the level of goodwill, understanding and (for intact relationships) warmth – and how this changed over their time on the RPC interventions.

4.2.1 Relationship warmth and support: start of journey

"I hope we can talk things out and not argue about it and hope to start having some date nights so we get time as a couple [...] I do think its [sic] gonna happen cos we are workimg [sic] hard for it."

Male, Intact, **diary entry**

At the beginning of their RPC journeys, many intact participants felt they needed to rekindle the warmth in their relationship, find ways of expressing their affection more, and spend more time with each other. There was a sense with these participants that there was more warmth than hostility in their relationship, or at least a desire on both sides to redress this balance, although many acknowledged they needed help to achieve this.

Separated participants beginning RPC interventions with the highest levels of hostility in their relationships talked about a lack of cooperation and a lack of respect, often with little motivation to change these things, particularly on the part of the other parent. Where hostility between separated parents involved threats over access to children, there was little room for goodwill or understanding in the relationship.

"I've had a situation where this man wants to destroy me [...] he wants to take my child from me [...] because I didn't want to be with him anymore [...] I'm still under scrutiny [...] it seems never ending it really does."

Female, Separated

4.2.2 Relationship warmth and support: mid–end of journey

For intact participants starting off with higher levels of motivation to increase warmth in their relationship, taking part in the sessions was often a wake-up call for them and their partners to rekindle the love and respect in their relationship. Most of these participants reported actively making more time for their partner, and their partners making the effort to take an interest in them and make plans together, often just a couple of sessions in.

"In the beginning you're in love and do everything for each other [...] and it's the little things and he's started doing them again. It's nice, he's remembering that we're both in the same situation [...] that has really been a lot to [do with] the sessions."

Female, Intact

For some, the process was more gradual, with emotional reconnection occurring after a series of incremental improvements in other areas – see Case Study D in this section.

Case Study D: A gradual process

Communication as a gateway to increased understanding and warmth

Participant D lived with her husband and two primary aged children. At the time of referral onto intervention sessions she was seriously considering divorce. Participant D felt she did everything related to housework and childcare and that her husband was not 'stepping up' as a husband or father. At the beginning of the sessions, Participant D's expectations were for her and her husband to re-establish the connection they once had, and for the father to be more involved with the children.

Sessions were tailored and flexed in terms of session content and practicalities: the practitioner adapted sessions to be one-to-one where necessary, and face-to-face where possible, helping with the husband's social anxiety and difficulties with Zoom. Participant D said one of the therapists kept in touch with them in between sessions and extended sessions beyond the usual number as they felt the couple needed more support. This approach brought about slow, incremental improvements to the relationship. By the end of their sessions, the couple were still together, and Participant D reported positive impacts on the children.

"Communication is begining [sic] to improve with my husband however not yet on an emotional level. Small talk but even so a step in the right direction"

"There have already been so many little changes [...] Our mindset has been changed to allow us to work together rather than against each other"

"[We] were supported to discuss very emotional aspects of our relationship. Although it was difficult [...] it was positive to see the progress my husband had made in being able to talk and share his thoughts/feelings. [...] Both my husband and myself checked in on each other later on which is not something we would have done previously."

"The children are [...] happier and more confident in talking about their own feelings. [They] now feel confident in asking their Dad for things instead of just me."

"Definitely improved in terms of communication and on an emotional level [...] doesn't feel like we're two separate people"

"If we hadn't of [sic] started these sessions [...] me and my husband would be separated." "My expectations are quite high now [...] of what we can achieve"

Participants starting off with more hostility and less goodwill reported more limited changes following the support. Some reported progress in communication but were less successful in connecting on a more emotional level.

“I have [noticed a change] to a certain extent; he does seem to be a bit more considerate of things that involve me. He will let me know that [child] isn’t at school today or [child] is at the dentist.”

Female, Separated

Separated parents with the highest levels of hostility were unlikely to have had, or sought, enough contact with the other parent to make great improvements in goodwill and understanding. A minority felt that, far from seeing improvements in this respect, their relationship had deteriorated further since RPC sessions began. This happened in cases where there were court proceedings in progress regarding access to children, and/or serious allegations between parents.

4.2.3 Understanding each other’s point of view: start of journey

Many participants believed that failure to see things from the other parent’s perspective, on either or both sides, was a major cause of the conflict in their relationship. They expressed a desire to understand the other parent, or for their partner understand them better.

“[Partner] doesn’t like arguing but has other issues to work through because he struggles to see others’ point of view.”

Female, Intact

Parents with better communication and more goodwill at the outset tended to acknowledge more that the lack of understanding was on both sides, or that they personally could benefit from greater understanding of, or empathy with, their partner.

Parents starting off with more hostility in their relationship – particularly separated parents – were more likely to think that the lack of understanding was mostly on the other parent’s part and mentioned issues such as the other parent’s reluctance to admit fault, and challenges related to neurodiversity (either diagnosed or speculated).

“I don’t think she’ll ever learn [...] doesn’t understand other people’s viewpoints.”

Male, Separated

Some of these parents in highly hostile relationships with their ex-partners were pessimistic that things could change; others hoped that the other parent would be compelled to see their point of view in the sessions.

4.2.4 Understanding each other's point of view: mid–end of journey

Intact parents beginning interventions with higher levels of goodwill towards the other parent reported the quickest and most substantial positive effects on their relationship during and at the end of sessions. They credited these improvements to a greater understanding of each other's point of view since starting RPC sessions, more relationship warmth and remembering why they were together in the first place.

Frequently, being given the opportunity to reflect on each other's perspective during sessions, and listen to each other in a safe space, prompted positive changes and significant leaps in mutual understanding, often at an early stage in participants' RPC journeys.

“Most valuable thing definitely has been finding out that my partner has been worrying about the same things I have; we want the same things and have the same values and we love each other even more than we thought.”

Female, Intact

One parent mentioned how she found it easier since starting sessions to admit she was wrong and apologise to the other parent.

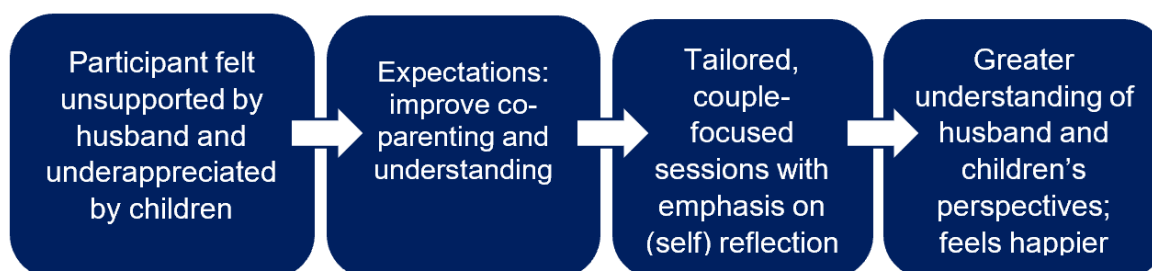
“I'm usually reluctant to apologise unless I've done something very wrong but I was happy to apologise because it was a genuine situation. [...] He accepted my apology and didn't argue with me. [...] I'd say that was quite a significant experience actually; it was the first time we'd been able to stop an argument in its tracks and gain a proper understanding.”

Female, Intact

Case Study E shows the journey of self-reflection and understanding that one parent went through while on the intervention.

Case Study E: Understanding each other

Self-reflection as a route to understanding



At the beginning of intervention sessions...

At the time of referral to couples' sessions, Participant E was experiencing deep resentment towards her husband due to lack of support within the household. She also felt considerable frustration towards her primary aged children, who she felt did not appreciate all she did for them. Her husband also suffered from depression.

Arguments were frequent, with clashes over parenting approaches, and criticisms on both sides. Participant E said she started sessions with the hope that they could parent together more effectively, communicate better, and understand each other's point of view. ***"I was hoping someone from outside could help me to see better."***

During intervention sessions...

Participant E saw the sessions as a form of couples' counselling, and a chance for her and her husband to communicate and share feelings with a professional there to help: ***"[husband] feels less vulnerable in front of them."*** The sessions focused strongly on reflection and self-evaluation: ***"[Practitioner] asked how I feel when I describe something [...] I mimic her [practitioner], asking my husband how he feels, like she did."***

While Participant E was less certain about the sessions having any consistent positive effect on her husband's feelings, she reported great leaps in her understanding of her feelings, both towards her husband and their children: ***"If I stop to think about what he's going through it's not pleasant – he's anxious and insecure; helps me to have less negative emotions towards him."***

At the end of intervention sessions...

"I used to expect my children to show appreciation of my "service". From one session I learnt [sic] that the majority of them don't show appreciation, thus it is normal for them [...] I kept reminding myself to adjust my expectations, trying to appreciate when they show [appreciation] instead of expecting it. This helps me to be more content and happier." – diary entry

Participant E also learned to reflect on how she comes across to her children and husband at times, and how this might contribute to the conflict.

Those with higher levels of hostility, most often separated parents, also reported improvements in understanding, if a little more cautiously. These participants often went into detail about specific aspects of the support that helped them and their mindset, such as getting into the habit of reflecting on how they and their (ex)partner feel in the moment; learning to understand the causes or underlying issues behind arguments and to focus on that rather than reacting to the anger; or being comfortable with the fact that they won't agree on everything.

"[The course] forces you in effect to consider from both sides [...] come at it from a perspective that you didn't do before [...] that's exactly what has turned out to be the case."

Male, Separated

Amongst participants starting off with the highest levels of hostility between them and the other parent, there was little evidence of improved understanding on the part of the participant towards the other parent.

4.2.5 Co-parenting, cooperation and support: start of journey

Sometimes conflict arose from different parenting styles, in some cases where one parent was perceived as undermining the other, for example, in terms of rules and discipline.

"He takes it too personally when I try to advise him how to parent [...] it's based on advice I'd learnt myself [...] We have conflict about punishment for our older [child]. [...] He thinks I'm too soft and I think he's too harsh."

Female, Intact

Amongst separated couples – with varying degrees of hostility in their relationship with the other parent – there was a greater focus on the other parent being uncooperative, unresponsive or unreliable in terms of communications around childcare and other aspects of co-parenting.

"I've had my ups and downs because of my ex-partner saying he would come and pick our little girl up then cancelled on her again last minute."

Female, Separated

Some separated parents reported what they perceived as spiteful or unfair behaviour from the other parent, through lack of flexibility with access arrangements and failure to cooperate with what they considered to be reasonable requests.

There was a feeling amongst many participants that they wanted to co-parent effectively, and a desire on the part of some separated parents to get to a stage where they can start or increase outings with both parents together with the children.

"We spoke about going to [...] try a family outing in addition to my visits, so [son] can see us at the same time, getting along during the time."

Male, Separated

4.2.6 Co-parenting, cooperation and support: mid–end of journey

Parents who started out with higher levels of goodwill talked about how they were learning from the sessions to work as a team, redistributing household chores more fairly, and presenting a united front in discipline matters.

Even amongst those starting out with higher levels of hostility, there were many who reported early improvements in negotiating with the other parent on parenting approaches, especially in intact couples: one participant said that she now had the confidence to bring up issues and get her point across during disagreements about co-parenting; others said they were more ready to accept advice from the other parent following the sessions.

“Prior to the sessions started I found it difficult to broach subjects with my husband regarding things he may disagree with in relation to the children. This was mainly due to the arguments it would cause.

The sessions have given me confidence to tackle this straight away but make sure I explain I value his opinion and give him opportunity to discuss things in a calm manner.”

Female, Intact, **diary entry**

There was less evidence that participants in the most hostile relationships with the other parent were making headway with co-parenting arrangements near the end of their RPC journey. These participants found it persistently difficult to engage the other parent in conversations about co-parenting and practicalities around access, as illustrated in the diary entry below.

“We both need to attend medical appointments, to ensure [...] future care plans are based on factual data, and that both parents [sic] experiences with our children, during the times we provide care are reflected. Mum is denying my requests to attend.”

Male, Separated, **diary entry**

Similarly, other RPC evaluation research⁶ found that many parents felt they had learned and implemented improvements but that this had little effect on the conflict when the other parent’s behaviour did not change.

⁶ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

4.2.7 Family life and relationships with children: start of journey

At the beginning of the intervention, participants often complained that the other parent did – or had done when they were together – very little in terms of childcare, or did not take an interest in spending time with the family.

Some parents felt guilty about not being able to dedicate enough time to their children due to busy working lives. A couple of separated participants mentioned how their children had seen ‘typical’, ‘ideal’ family set ups on television and had indicated that they wanted to have the same experiences.

“[Children] would make reference when you see things on the [TV] she would say things like we’re not a proper family [...] youngest one was quite hostile towards their dad [...] absolutely it was having a big impact on the children.”

Female, Intact

Sometimes parents’ difficulty responding to their children’s mental health issues, neurodiversity or general development and behavioural issues had negatively impacted one or both parents’ relationship with the children, and how they interacted or spent time with them.

Some children with separated parents did not want to spend time with the other parent, resisted going to their home or avoided their communication attempts.

4.2.8 Family life and relationships with children: mid–end of journey

“I have noticed a real big difference in my children since doing the course and would definitely recommend it [...] My daughter has become more polite and has a better attitude and the boys listen a lot more and are more polite.”

Female, Separated, **diary entry**

By the end of their RPC journey, participants commonly reported calmer households, and some mentioned improved relationships with their children. Some attributed these improvements to improved parenting skills and assertiveness on the part of themselves and the other parent. Others mentioned how they were now putting their relationship with their children above the conflict in their relationship with the other parent.

A couple of participants mentioned how a greater understanding of their child's neurodiversity and/or behavioural issues had led to improvements and more time spent with the children. Many parents mentioned how they and/or the other parent had started making more effort to have fun and spend quality time with their children since starting the sessions.

"[Partner and children] were having Nerf wars [...] I bought the laser guns so that we could have like laser tag [...] was spontaneous [...] I was upstairs [...] absolutely massive for the children."

Female, Intact, **diary entry**

Where there was greater hostility in the parental relationship, this was often mirrored in more difficult relationships between parent(s) and children, and there was little evidence of any improvements in this respect since starting the sessions.

"I feel that the massive stumbling block that I have with my youngest child is the relationship that I have with my ex partner [...] I feel like anything I say to my youngest or any stuff that I put in place is very quickly undone and undermined."

Female, Separated, **diary entry**

4.2.9 Emotional effect of conflict on children: start of journey

Parents reported a wide range of impacts of the conflict on their children. These ranged from parents being asked about the conflict by their children and concern that they are witness to it, to children being witness to – and sometimes repeating – negative things one parent has said about the other and even mimicking this negative form of communication.

"Well some of the kids are starting to copy [...] my seven year old says 'you're not in charge' 'you're not the boss of me', 'you can't tell me what to do.'"

Female, Intact

Parents also reported a range of emotional and behavioural impacts of the conflict or separation on their children, including clinginess; eating disorders; physical, behavioural, and emotional issues; despondency/sadness; and fear of abandonment. Some also mentioned problems at school, including disruptive behaviour, social problems, and refusal to attend.

"[Daughter's] actually getting counselling at school because she's still not at the point where she accepts that we're not together."

Female, Separated

Most often, though, parents described the emotional impact on their children in vaguer terms, including unspecified negative effects and impacts.

4.2.10 Emotional effect of conflict on children: mid–end of journey

After their time on the RPC sessions, some participants showed an increased awareness of the impact conflict was having on their children. One parent noticed a rapid improvement in their young child’s mood when he and the other parent made the effort to be more civil to each other.

“After the first course date [...] me and [ex-partner] [...] were just a lot more, erm, pleasant with each other, especially at handovers and stuff, and there seemed to be an instant lift in how [child] presented; she seemed to feed off of how we handled each other.”

Male, Separated

Some mothers described how their children’s wellbeing had improved since their fathers spent more time with them; others mentioned how greater unity between parents meant it was easier to set boundaries for the children. At least one parent with high levels of hostility in their relationship felt children were still witnessing conflict, and the resulting poor behaviour endured throughout their time on the intervention.

“I have repeatedly asked for him to not discuss these issues in front of the kids, and his reply is I don’t care what the kids hear and see what is going on between us which I find it extremely detrimental to the kids and they are often upset in the handovers but he will make a point of having the last word.”

Female, Separated, **diary entry**

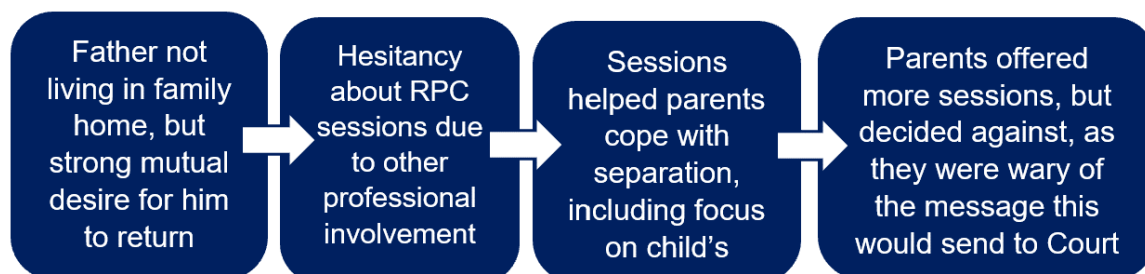
Parents who were concerned for their child’s mental health and wellbeing often engaged well with practical advice and approaches aimed at establishing rules and boundaries and increasing family harmony – see section 5.2 for more detail on session content. Some of these parents reported improvements in their child’s mental health or wellbeing during the parent’s time on the intervention.

“Me and my daughter are a lot happier [...] and I feel a lot more confident, like I’m a good mum.”

Female, Separated

Case Study F: Support services pulling in different directions

Imperfect outcomes relating to the involvement of other services



This case study offers an example of where the different services involved in a family's support struggled to complement each other. Couple F had been in an intact relationship but living apart for several months, their daughter living with the mother. Both parents were keen to live together as a family again; children's social care (usually referred to as social services) were, in the view of both parents, preventing a hasty reconciliation, causing considerable frustration. This situation affected their RPC expectations and potential outcomes, but the sessions were still able to support the parents in some capacity.

The father's absence from the family home meant their child suffered from separation anxiety.

"She's not slept [...] cries out every night, it's just exhausting" – mother.

"Every time I leave she breaks her heart and says 'please don't leave Daddy'" – father.

The course helped both parents: teaching meditation, understanding each other's emotions, and discussing things rather than 'bottling them up', including taking a step back when needed: ***"We're both a lot calmer. We're both more accepting about it [...] we're both [...] trying to make sure she doesn't have to go through too much" – mother.*** However, the intervention could not provide support to allow the parents to move back in together: ***"It's a shame that there is no way that they [practitioners] can genuinely get involved in the whole situation with the social workers." – mother.***

The involvement of other professional services also impacted participation in sessions for parents: ***"There was a way we could potentially get a few more sessions [...] with the court hearing, we mutually agreed that it would come across as if we feel we were in more need of support for our relationship." – mother.*** These factors meant there were fewer immediate positive impacts of sessions, including improvements to their child's wellbeing. Ultimately, the course still enabled Couple F to look to the future: ***"We know more about how we want our family, our future to look like. We've got the same goals. It's just getting past the situation we're in now and then, we're confident that once we get through all this, we can pretty much handle anything together." – mother.***

4.3 Emotional regulation over time

Support relating to emotional regulation and wellbeing was relevant for all participants, but often it was the focus of support for those who had the most hostile relationships with the other parent, where opportunities for improvement in communication and/or goodwill were limited.

4.3.1 Mental health and wellbeing

At the start of the RPC journey, many parents described how conflict and the stress and responsibilities associated with family life had a profound effect on their mental wellbeing and that of the other parent and/or their children. They described feelings of tiredness, anxiety and being overwhelmed.

“Emotionally drained, I get like knots in my stomach [...] really anxious [...] it’s always, like, never ending.”

Female, Separated

Some parents said that they had no time for themselves, and some (predominantly mothers) felt that the responsibility of childcare and/or housework was all theirs, leading to mental and physical exhaustion, and feelings of resentment.

During and following RPC support, some participants found benefits in self-reflection, which helped them understand their own biases, triggers and emotions, respond appropriately to conflict, and understand the other parent.

“Being able to understand my emotions and my family’s emotions so I don’t lose my temper [...] me being aggressive affects my family.”

Male, Intact

“Our daughter is in hospital, with [mental health condition]. Tough times are with us. We are all managing to get through it, but the lessons taught by [practitioner] are helping hugely. Allowing each-other space and time, understanding and mindfulness.”

Male, Intact, **diary entry**

There were some parents whose children were suffering from mental health issues (see sections 4.2.9 and 4.2.10), with little or no improvement by the end of their time on the intervention. Sometimes this was because the complexity and nature of the mental health issues meant that progress in the mid-term was more difficult, but in these cases there was often progress through other outcomes, such as parents’ positive response to and application of emotional regulation tools learnt in sessions (see section 5.2.3). These could help parents deal with the effects of mental ill health and emotional issues in their children.

4.3.2 Mindset change

Many participants demonstrated a shift in perspective or mindset when it came to conflict with the other parent, which helped them to change their own behaviour and approach, with positive results both for the conflict itself and their own outlook and wellbeing.

Some mentioned how they had learnt to let go of things that are beyond their control and concentrate on what they can control. Some said they were learning to 'pick their battles', and gain perspective by focusing on the most important things, such as their children's wellbeing, and letting the smaller things go.

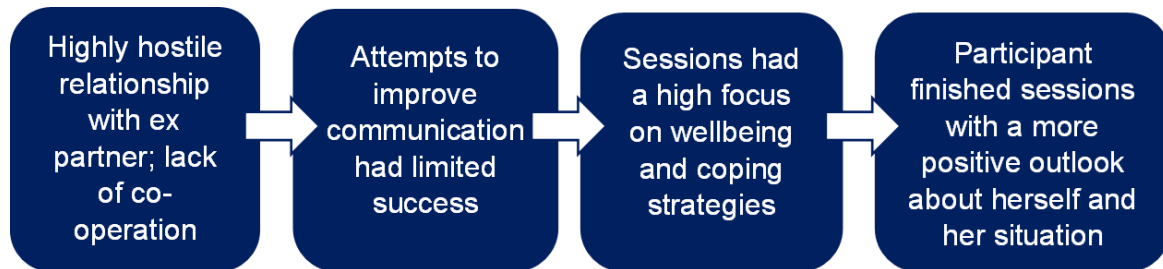
"The course saying about how you can change yourself, keep your actions positive that's all you can really do. Well I can't change that other person that's just how he is, I don't have much to hide, I'm quite happy with who I am."

Female, Separated

These shifts in mindset were particularly important for parents where high hostility in their relationship meant opportunities for progress in communication and goodwill were limited. Case Study G provides an example of this.

Case Study G: Emotional regulation

Coping with highly hostile relations with ex-partner



At the beginning of intervention sessions...

Participant G was separated from her husband. They shared 2 primary aged children who spent equal time with each parent. At the time of referral to group sessions, their relationship was extremely hostile.

There was no face-to-face communication between the two at all at the time of referral, and Participant G's ex-husband frequently failed to cooperate with her attempts to coordinate or change childcare arrangements by text. She did not know at any point if her ex-husband was attending RPC sessions but was certain that he needed the help: ***"He really needs this help [...] stonewalls me, doesn't talk to me, is very negative [...] just shut down."***

During intervention sessions...

Participant G reported that the main benefits to her from participation included having the opportunity to hear others' experiences and the content on self-care and wellbeing. ***"Coping skills, breathing techniques [...] that worked for me."*** The support encouraged her to be more reflective, and to focus on what she could control, rather than worrying about what she could not control: ***"[Ex-husband] could look really angry about something but you don't know what [...] what that other person might be thinking [...] something completely unrelated [...] shouldn't let that person's feelings impact on you [...] two separate people."***

At the end of intervention sessions...

Participant G reported no reduced conflict by the end of her sessions, despite using some communication techniques such as a business-like approach, and she did not believe that her ex-husband had attended any sessions. She did, however, feel happier about herself, and reported improved wellbeing. She also continued to make efforts not to let her negative feelings about her ex-husband affect the children.

"[The intervention] was really good; I would recommend it even for people not going through separations, for people for life skills and looking after yourself in general."

4.4 Parental journeys – conflict over time: conclusions

From the start to the end of their time on an intervention, many parents experienced improvements in their relationship with the other parent and some made

improvements in practical communication only; others reported lessening of hostility and increased goodwill. The nature and extent of improvements was determined by factors such as the cause and intensity of conflict, relationship status and participant motivation and engagement with support.

In cases of extreme hostility, RPC support had a limited effect on both communication and goodwill but was most able to help participants through provision of emotional and wellbeing support. Similarly, other RPC evaluation research⁷ found that a minority of participants who felt their relationship was 'beyond repair' reported no (or limited) positive impacts on their relationship following experience of RPC support.

The three broad areas of progress over time identified in this longitudinal analysis – communication, goodwill and emotional regulation – align with wider RPC evaluation research, which found that some of the most useful things taken from sessions were communication with their (ex-)partner (25%), seeing things from the perspective of others (19%), and how to handle conflict/stressful situations (15%).

In addition to reductions in parental conflict, some parents reported corresponding improvements in their children's behaviour and wellbeing, and in family relationships more generally. Others talked more about feeling better able to manage and respond to challenging behaviour in their children but did not yet talk about improvements in their child's behaviour or their relationship with their child. Again, this aligns with other RPC evaluation research that found that improvements in child-related RPC outcomes were more commonly observed in the longer term, 12 months after finishing RPC support; the diary research appears to be showing the first step towards these outcomes as parents learn and apply parenting strategies whilst still taking part in interventions.

⁷ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

Chapter 5: Findings relating to the intervention journey

This chapter provides descriptive findings on four key themes (and their sub-themes) of the RPC intervention journey:

- referral
- support content and delivery
- session practicalities
- session disengagement

Each theme starts with key findings and includes a summary of the key elements of support that worked for each sub-theme.

5. Intervention journeys: process and content

5.1 Theme 1 – Referral

This section provides key findings on the referral process, including the route through which people were referred, the information provided about interventions, and participant expectations of the support that had an impact on participation and engagement.

5.1.1 Referral: Key findings

- Separate conversations with each parent during the referral process helped both to engage.
- Where sufficient time had been taken to inform parents and answer any questions, parents were less apprehensive about agreeing to participate.
- Providing both parents with necessary referral contact information ensured both were aware of and involved in the process, helping engagement.
- Parents who were aware of the other parent's referral to sessions and agreement to participate tended to engage better with the process.

5.1.2 Referral: Information provided to parents

Parents generally felt positive about the referral process and the information provided about the intervention, but there was some apprehension.

Information was provided to participants via phone call, email, discussions with practitioners at information events and advertisements on social media. Most diary research participants felt they had received sufficient information about the sessions and had been given the opportunity to ask questions, including one parent who said they were happy with less information as the course was free to attend.

“There wasn’t a huge amount of information or maybe [...] I didn’t retain it [...] because it was free, I didn’t need anyone to sell it me, I was willing to give it a go.”

Female, Intact

It was a common view amongst participants that there would have been benefit in knowing whether their ex-partner was also attending, and many found it helpful when both parents had separate referral calls.

Similar findings were reported in the wider RPC evaluation research⁸ – participants generally felt well informed about the interventions and for many, engagement was partially dependent on knowledge that the other parent would be attending sessions.

Across providers and interventions, there was variation in delivery of written information: this included emails, leaflets, booklets and books with support-related content. Some parents whose referral was arranged through telephone conversations felt they would have benefitted from more written information prior to the start of the sessions, due to the time between referral and the beginning of the intervention.

“It would’ve been nice if there’d been a leaflet or something over email [...] if you’ve got something written, because you forget something over telephone calls [...] something written down you can refer back to it and read over it.”

Male, Intact

Others felt more information would have overloaded them and they were keen to just get started. A small number of parents were unsure why a course book had been provided when it was not referred to during sessions, while others continued to refer to the content in these books even after completion of sessions.

5.1.3 Referral: How parents were supported into referral

There were two common referral routes onto RPC: through children’s social care,⁹ or by recommendation via court order during access hearings.

⁸ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

⁹ Children’s social care was usually referred to by parents as social services.

Other RPC evaluation research¹⁰ found that there was some confusion amongst referral staff about eligibility to take part in sessions, for example, if actively engaging with the court process over access disputes. In this diary research, parents often said they felt the course should be made widely available prior to involvement with children's social care or court. Other referral routes included self-referral online, or referral through local charities or schools.

"I was just like scrolling and I saw the ad and I thought I better strike while the iron's hot [...] and what was good was that someone contacted me straight away."

Female, Intact

There were several factors that prompted referral onto sessions, or affected the support provided or referral route taken. These included changes to relationships and personal circumstances that affected conflict between parents and more widely in their families. Challenges relating to these changing circumstances were in some cases the main motivating factor for seeking help.

Child maintenance arrangements

The consensus, looking at all the evaluation evidence, is that separated parents who were using the Child Maintenance Service at the point of referral were usually the hardest to help because interparental conflict was intense. In this study, many of the parents experiencing high hostility with the other parent mentioned disagreements around supporting and financially providing for children as a source of conflict, which in some cases contributed to referral.

Court recommendations

A small number of participants said they were recommended referral onto targeted interventions through the courts. These parents often felt that interventions were mandatory, or worried that there would be repercussions for their case if they did not attend. They were more likely to see it as a 'box-ticking exercise' than to understand the ways in which the support could help them. Of the parents involved in this research, it was common for these parents to report having received little or no information on intervention aims or how to self-refer.

Parents involved in court, particularly non-primary carers, often felt the other parent would not follow court-ordered arrangements, and the strain of inconsistent access arrangements made it harder to trust and respect the other parent (see Case Study H). Even with court orders in place, there was still conflict over access, which sometimes resulted in parents going back to court.

¹⁰ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

“Without the arguments there would be no access at all. I’ve had to fight [...] without that there would be no contact arrangements. I know that because whenever she’s had control, she’s stopped all contact arrangements.”

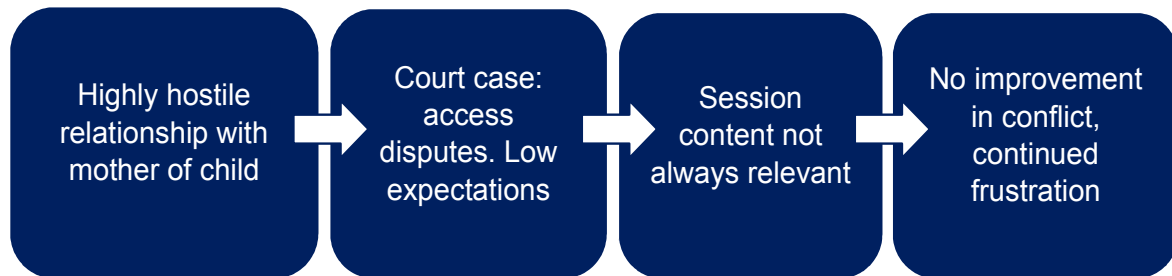
Male, Separated

On occasion during the court process, parents faced what they described as false accusations, which exacerbated conflict and negatively affected their wellbeing. Furthermore, in cases where the court cases had not finished when they completed the intervention, RPC would be unable to address the additional conflict that court cases may have led to. It should also be noted that ongoing legal proceedings were a leading reason why some parents did not start the interventions or left early.¹¹

¹¹ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

Case Study H: Referral route

High intensity conflict, frustrated by experiences



Participant H was recommended RPC sessions through court after access disputes with his ex-partner, having been denied access to his child for several months.

At the beginning of intervention sessions...

Participant H engaged with the sessions but found the session content **“patronising”** and found the timing of sessions alongside the court case ill-judged: **“[It] just loses sight of the fact that people are entrenched still in this process”** which created more turbulence, affecting the court process. In this sense, he felt the sessions **“achieve the opposite of what they intend to.”**

During intervention sessions...

Part of the course content involved helping parents to be assertive with their (ex-) partners, but Participant H felt this was unrealistic as the non-primary carer: **“You have no choice but to be passive.”** He felt the solution for interventions would be to have different versions of the course: **“one for primary carers [...] one for people without [primary care].”**

Participant H felt the course was **“not doing anything to make us better at communication”** as the parents did not attend together. **“The intended outcomes only come with cooperation.”** **“They either need to deal with mediating between parents or they need to make more of an effort to facilitate parenting plans.”**

At the end of intervention sessions...

Participant H felt the course was of little use to him, which added to his frustration. He felt that the recommendations in the court order contradicted course recommendations, as the parenting plans that he submitted (as recommended in the course) were rejected for being too detailed, despite the course book stating: **“the more detailed the parenting plan is, the better.”** He felt **“the family court should know this book inside and out.”**

5.2 Theme 2 – Support content and delivery

This section describes the specific support, learning and tools delivered during RPC sessions, highlighting which were most and least effective for different groups, in a cross-sectional view of participants' experiences of RPC intervention support.

Support content and delivery: key findings

- Sharing experiences (including hearing the experiences of group members or practitioners) was highly beneficial, boosting confidence and reducing stress.
- Impartiality and lack of judgement in practitioners led to open and honest reflections from participants. Parents were more engaged with intervention content when practitioners took time to build rapport.
- Continually tailoring session content to the changing circumstances of the families led to increased engagement and satisfaction with interventions. Tailoring the communication topics was helpful where cases required more nuanced support/complexity (i.e. not sticking to a prescribed format).
- Both separated and intact parents learnt constructive communication skills, including listening to the other parent, taking care with manner and tone, and approaching difficult conversations differently.
- For parents attending couples' sessions, creating a safe space to share and listen, with support from an impartial practitioner, was key to facilitating dialogue.
- For intact couples, practitioners encouraging them to make time for each other often had immediate positive outcomes.
- For separated couples, learning to self-reflect and taking time to consider the other parent's perspective reduced feelings of hostility for many.
- Highlighting the impact of arguments on children was powerful and enlightening for many parents.
- Teaching parents about self-care and the positive effects this could have on their children encouraged them to actively work on improving their wellbeing.
- Parents with anxiety, or high hostility towards the other parent, benefitted from learning practical tools and techniques to manage stress and gain perspective.
- Sometimes, being unable to have couples' sessions due to a variety of factors including the nature of the conflict, prevented parents with very hostile relationships from having the chance to communicate with each other in sessions.

5.2.1 Support content and delivery: Communication

The most frequently mentioned topic across RPC support was communication, both in the relationship between parents, and within families. Improved communication was at the forefront of participants' hopes and expectations, and most of the support

described centred around discussions, tools, and techniques for improved communication. This section will show what specific communication support and techniques delivered were most and least effective.

“I’m hoping I can pass on some information and maybe find ways I can communicate with him where he won’t feel like I’m maybe attacking him.”

Female, Separated

Participants talked about a variety of session topics relating to improving communication in relationships, including manner and tone, managing anger, mode of communication, listening skills and assertiveness.

Manner and tone

A recurring theme from sessions was an increased awareness of tone and manner in communications with the other parent (and children). This might include paying attention to how body language and tone of voice or written communications could affect communications and fuel conflict. Tone and manner were also mentioned in relation to what children could pick up on. This topic was most often mentioned as helpful by intact parents with lower levels of hostility in their relationship, but others felt the positive effects too.

“Communications have still been pretty poor but there was one email which was pretty reasonable [...] change in tone [...] made me think ah, maybe she’s started the course.”

Male, Separated

Participants mentioned learning about more considerate ways of communicating, or taking a less accusatory approach, especially when giving constructive feedback. Examples included acknowledging the good as well as the bad, and saying how something made them feel, rather than what the other person did.

Managing anger

Several parents mentioned staying calm as a topic covered in sessions, with some saying it had helped facilitate better conversations with the other parent during disagreements. Participants mentioned that they found it helpful to learn techniques for de-escalation of arguments, such as taking a deep breath and thinking before you speak. Some mentioned taking time out to cool off before responding to challenging communications from the other parent, either by text or face-to-face, giving the participant time to respond reasonably and constructively.

“I have been able to talk more openly and in a much more calmer manor [sic]. Before our session I could be put in a bad mood very easily and hold a grudge wich [sic] stopped me being able to communicate effectively.”

Female, Separated, **diary entry**

Mode of communication

Another theme covered in sessions was mode of communication and the risk of misinterpretation, including discussions around how raising an issue via text or email can come across quite differently from raising the same issue face to face. This knowledge from sessions was cited as helping improve communications.

“I think if you communicate better you’re happier [...] how you present yourself when you’re talking to someone is different to how you present yourself in a text message [...] you can see it in a different way to how you would speak it.”

Male, Intact, **diary entry**

Listening skills

Many participants, particularly those in intact relationships said that they or the other parent had gained a greater awareness of the importance of listening from the sessions, often through the experience of sitting down with their partner, with the practitioner to mediate. See the ‘Focus on: couples’ sessions’ below for more detail on how this was achieved.

Focus on: Couples’ sessions

Time and space to talk

For intact parents, a recurring theme was the practitioners’ role in facilitating constructive – and sometimes difficult and emotional – conversations that were not happening at home.

Simply having the time and space to sit down and discuss issues that were not usually brought up, or not discussed in a constructive way, helped many couples.

“I was using the sessions to communicate with my husband because we weren’t doing a very good job up until that point.”

Female, Intact

Some parents in couples’ sessions felt that having a third party there – the practitioner – made all the difference: it enabled open and constructive discussion, ensuring both parents had their say. Participants in these sessions mentioned the impartiality, fairness and lack of judgement of the practitioners.

“I don’t think it was what my partner wanted because she was more looking for I think a judge in some ways and basically the lady running the course doesn’t take sides.”

Male, Separated

Those starting out with less goodwill and poorer communication in their relationships were less likely to think this improved communication would continue outside of sessions.

Assertiveness

Some parents – especially those who were separated with limited communication or more hostile relations with the other parent – mentioned how the sessions had given them the tools to approach conversations more assertively and with more confidence. This included content involving the effective use of language and business-like approaches, in sessions and in workbooks. See ‘Focus on: highly hostile relationships’ in this section for more detail.

“I now feel more rather than bury my head in the sand and try not to talk about things that matter [...] actually have the confidence to be able to do that [...] I don’t feel afraid to broach subjects [...] rather than things spiralling.”

Female, Intact

However, not all parents found assertiveness practice beneficial (see Case Study H in section 5.1.3).

Focus on: Highly hostile relationships

Alternative approaches to communication

Among separated parents with higher levels of hostility and poorer communication, many talked about employing a more business-like approach, advocated by the sessions. This involved treating their communications with the other parent in a professional, detached manner: leaving emotion out, staying civil, and only responding to necessary communications. Many parents with difficult relationships took this approach on.

"I have not included any emotive text and I have been assertive and straight to the point. I am trying to also be polite and using 'please' and 'thank you'."

Female, Separated

One participant in a highly hostile relationship described learning about and using alternative, non-verbal forms of communication with his child's mother as a way of keeping her in the loop and maintaining civility. This involved sharing photos of the child and the child's achievements.

"I tried a new way of communication with my child's [mum] in the form of photographs and pictures of what my child had been doing and baking.

The outcome was positive but short and sweet which was possibly the best outcome I could have asked for, and would I do it again you ask? Yes I would find it very effective a short way to communicate and positive.

Male, Separated, **diary entry**

One parent felt that the approaches taught did not always lead to positive outcomes, as they could be used by the other parent to manipulate communication:

"The sessions are great but when you're dealing with somebody like my ex who has a [mental health] disorder, I think it can be a bit dangerous because it gives them the tools to [use against you]."

Female, Separated

Children and communication

Many parents said that before starting the sessions they had been unaware of how much conflict children – even very young children – could pick up on, even where the parent believed they avoided arguing in front of them. Some were also unaware, before starting sessions, of the extent of the negative impact parental conflict could have on their children. While many were already concerned about children witnessing overt hostility and arguments, parents also mentioned learning how the conflict could come across to children in subtle ways too, for example, by questioning children too much about what they had done at the other parent's house, or when intact parents ignored each other.

“I think during handovers they've never witnessed [...] there's never been any verbalisation between me and Mum at all [...] if anything they've picked up on the fact that [...] by ignoring each other, that's not the correct way to do it [...] I find the course particularly helpful from that perspective.”

Male, Separated

Many parents mentioned learning the importance of letting children air grievances, have their say and come to understandings in an open and safe environment, with some introducing family meetings as a helpful ad hoc or routine tool.

Some parents learned alternative techniques to encourage their children to share their feelings and worries where this was difficult, either through reluctance or because of the child's age. One parent mentioned how they had learned in a group session to encourage their young son to write down his worries in a book that they could look at together and discuss.

Content relating to discipline and boundaries included setting rules and expectations, encouraging children to listen and to see other points of view, and introducing consequences, such as temporarily taking away privileges, to tackle poor behaviour.

“The kids have input on these rules [...] a chart in the sitting room [...] there [were] also consequences [...] it was really [practitioner's] idea.”

Male, Intact

Parents appreciated being given specific, actionable advice that they could implement in their family home immediately. (Case Study C in section 4.1.6 gives an example of positive outcomes using these techniques.)

5.2.2 Support content and delivery: Goodwill

Separate evaluation of the effects of the interventions on relationships found large improvements for both intact and separated parents.¹² This diary research expands on this to consider three broad areas for both intact and separated parents: understanding and empathy, self-reflection, and making time for each other, showing what specific support and techniques to improve goodwill between parents were most effective, and for whom.

Understanding and empathy

Participants talked about how RPC sessions had taught them to reflect more on the reasons behind their partner or children's behaviour. Some talked about how they had learned not to make assumptions about what the other parent is thinking, or the reasons why they might behave or say the things they do. Some mentioned how they had a greater appreciation now of the pressures the other parent might be under.

Participants described this learning being delivered in a variety of ways, including through videos, group discussions, and one-on-one conversations with the other parent, facilitated by the practitioner (see 'Focus on: couples' sessions' in this section).

Self-reflection

Participants were taught to reflect on their own behaviour and approach to disagreements and conflict, including impacts on others. Sessions also taught participants to reflect on what their and the other parent's 'trigger points' might be – how to spot when things are about to go awry and deal with this.

Increased self-awareness was cited by some as helping them to understand the other parent, and increased positive feelings and respect, or even relationship warmth, sometimes followed.

Making time for each other

The importance of making time for each other was something that many intact participants took away from sessions. For some, simply having somebody say 'make time for each other' was the catalyst needed to rekindle their relationship or spend more time as a family. This involved making the time to do shared activities, but also to stop and check in with each other, and show more active interest in each other.

One parent described being assigned 'homework' by the RPC practitioner to increase goodwill, with positive results:

"Our homework over the last two weeks was to have at least one spontaneous hug and to have an emotional conversation. This actually happened within 24 hours."

Female, Intact, **diary entry**

¹² DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: An evaluation of the effects of interventions on parental relationships and children, London: Department for Work and Pensions

Focus on: Couples' sessions

Adapting sessions to parents' needs

In couples' sessions there was often an emphasis on tailored support, with more flexibility as to topics covered and support offered than in group sessions.

"It's been very kind of open minded [...] what's been going on, how's it been [...] no pressure [...] led on what was important for us and for the kids."

Female, Intact

Often the practitioners would base session content around a predetermined structure, but topics were kept fluid to adapt to relationship or family issues.

"It's led by us; she's [practitioner] trying to have a structure in place but we've had quite a bit of problems [...] don't often get to points [practitioner] tries to raise, but what we are bringing instead."

Male, Separated

Another, less-commonly mentioned benefit of couples' sessions, was the chance to reflect on the previous couple of weeks, acknowledging successes and setbacks.

Certain contextual factors, including acrimonious access disputes, high tensions over new partners and tensions relating to perceived alcohol and drug abuse added a level of complexity which prevented big improvements in goodwill between parents, or made progress in this area more difficult. The impact of some of these factors sometimes went beyond the support that RPC interventions could provide, and in these cases there was often little or limited improvement in communication or goodwill by the end of the intervention. The following 'focus on' boxes illustrate some of these contextual factors.

Focus on: Access restrictions

Access restrictions causing or exacerbating conflict

Some access arrangements were restricted, through court or by the primary carer, or by children who refused to stick to access agreements. This often caused resentment.

“There is a formal arrangement but my son’s not sticking to it, he’s refusing to see him [father] [...] He didn’t ever stay overnight – he didn’t want to.”

Female, Separated

Even if arrangements were in place and adhered to, parents on occasion felt the other parent intentionally arranged access to be inflexible, or created conflict whenever they saw their children, leading to stress and worry.

“I am simply asking him to swap weekends and he is extremely reluctant to talk to me or to agree to the new plans.”

Female, Separated

During the intervention, restrictions and disputes over access continued. For some, an open platform to speak candidly with the other parent in interventions reduced the level of resentment between parents.

Focus on: Household structures and networks

The impact of new relationships on conflict

Some parents failed to inform the other parent of new relationships after separation, leading to uncertainty and conflict, particularly where care for children was shared.

“When we split up and he started a new relationship he kept that a secret until after the baby was born.”

Female, Separated

Parents identified changes to the other parent or child’s behaviour, often believing that this was due to the new relationship. While some new partners actively encouraged the relationship and communication between the children and the other parent, there were some who thought that the other parent’s new partner was actively hindering communication or adding to the conflict.

There were some participants who felt that the new partner wanted to be present for all communication between parents, adding to the conflict. A small number of participants also felt suspicious that the new partner had been listening in on RPC sessions.

“I think he wasn’t in his house when he was doing [the session]. I think she was listening in.”

Female, Separated

These tensions added complexity to the nature of the conflict and affected how participants applied learning from their sessions.

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked in relation to improving goodwill (positive feelings) towards the other parent.

5.2.3 Support content and delivery: Emotional regulation

The third broad theme covered across RPC sessions involves elements that can be categorised under the term ‘emotional regulation’, a key element of RPC support for some parents.

“My expectations [were] getting a bit more of an understanding about my [partner’s] feelings, but I’ve learned so much more, about safe space and understanding my emotions more, about my mental health and my aggression.”

Male, Intact

Participants mentioned a range of topics covered in sessions that were designed to help them manage their emotions and cope with the impact of the parental conflict in their lives. Common approaches and techniques mentioned by participants included:

- Developing confidence and assertiveness with the other parent
- Self-awareness and self-reflection
- Breaking patterns and cycles of negative thinking and/or behaviour
- Gaining perspective and focusing on the present, and what you can control
- Mindfulness
- Stress management
- Breathing and relaxation techniques (including meditation, and yoga)
- Self-care, including taking time for yourself
- Coping skills and problem-solving

“So I was meant to go out [...] but I had a very very bad panic attack but I sat down and done some of the breathing and relaxing methods that I learnt on the course and that really helped me [...] I definitely will be using the relaxing method all the time now.”

Female, Separated, **diary entry**

A small number of research participants had exclusively one-to-one sessions with their practitioner. For those going through very difficult situations with the other parent, having the chance to offload regularly to their practitioner in a one-to-one session was invaluable. These parents appreciated the tailoring of one-to-one sessions to their needs, whether that be through a greater focus on mental health, or frequent adaptation of the course material to their changing situations.

“Initially, it was going to be something to work on with [other parent], but then circumstances changed and I appreciate that they were willing to be flexible with that.”

Female, Separated

The session content on emotional regulation was often most pertinent for separated parents coming from relationships with very high levels of hostility. Many parents said the sessions helped them gain perspective, and to focus on what was within their control.

Focus on: Mental and physical health

Emotional support where mental health affects conflict

Depression, extended periods of low mood, and various anxieties were mentioned frequently by participants. There were some indications of improvements regarding specific mental health conditions, for example, where participants went on to seek diagnosis and specialist support.

Participants talked about how poor mental health affected family relationships and contributed to conflict, or vice versa. There were improvements to some extent as the sessions progressed, as participants learned coping skills and had opportunities to talk about their experiences in sessions.

“These sessions are very important for families [...] I went through a hell of a time, my mental health, my children’s [...] It started with understanding my mind, relaxation she was teaching me.”

Female, Separated

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked in relation to improving parents’ emotional regulation and wellbeing, based on the findings in this section and section 4.3.

5.2.4 Support content and delivery: Practitioners

Most of the parents involved in this study felt their practitioners were non-judgemental, impartial and understanding, describing them as friendly, approachable and confident. This is echoed by the wider RPC evaluation research¹³ which found that facilitators left parents feeling ‘comfortable’ and ‘valued’. Most felt they explained things clearly and encouraged open and honest communication, whether between couples or in groups.

Participants in couples’ sessions found the practitioner’s role in facilitating difficult conversations helpful, especially where both parents had an equal chance to share their perspectives and feelings. Some practitioners referred to their own experiences to show empathy and understanding, which participants responded well to.

“The sessions and support received have been objective and inclusive at all times. The approach used has enabled a therapeutic relationship to be developed between ourselves and clinician. This I feel maximises our opportunity for success.”

Female, Intact, **diary entry**

¹³ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

Where practitioners had managed to establish a strong foundation of trust, participants were particularly open to receiving and acting on their advice. Positive feedback from practitioners also helped boost confidence.

Personal characteristics of participants had some impact on how they felt about their practitioners, particularly at the start of the journey or where there was apprehension about taking part. A couple of male participants felt uncomfortable with a female practitioner, feeling that they had a bias against fathers. A few parents would have appreciated support from a practitioner from the same cultural background, or with a good understanding of their culture. In one case, this was possible, and greatly appreciated:

“It was helpful that we were assigned to a facilitator that understood the cultural dynamic behind our parenting. In terms of my husband’s background and my background, it was helpful that facilitator was able to understand and share some of our experiences. That affinity allowed us to feel more comfortable in the intervention.”

Female, Intact

Feedback on practitioners’ approach and manner was not always positive. In a small number of cases, practitioners failed to establish trust or rapport with their participants:

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked in relation to how practitioners approached the sessions and delivered support.

5.2.5 Support content and delivery: Materials

Videos

Participants mentioned the videos shown in sessions, with actors playing out scenarios. Participants’ reactions to the videos were mainly positive, finding the scenarios illuminating, for example, where they showed the impact of negative or hurtful communication and alternative approaches were presented. This helped parents understand how the support related to their own situations.

“[Videos] were actually helpful, they were showing us like when people get talked to like rubbish and then another one [...] how people should speak to each other.”

Female, Intact

The videos helped instigate discussion, reflection, and sharing of perspectives.

Reading Materials

Many parents had been sent reading material in advance of or at the beginning of their sessions. Some practitioners referred to these resources and prompted participants to read the materials provided, others said that the materials were not used during the sessions, or that they didn't align clearly with the session content. Where parents were guided to read relevant sections of the reading materials, this was appreciated.

“Two of the books were not relevant to our situation [...] Our practitioner only used the parts of the books that were relevant to us so time wasn't wasted.”

Female, Separated, **diary entry.**

5.3 Theme 3 – Session practicalities

This section considers the practicalities of sessions, including delivery mode, type of session, and scheduling and organisation of the sessions, including rescheduling.

Session practicalities: Key findings

- Tailoring session length and frequency – and intervention timing – to suit changing circumstances and personal preferences throughout helped maintain engagement.
- Ensuring advance notice and an organised approach to scheduling and rescheduling appointments, with reminders and catching up on content where appropriate, was helpful.
- Enabling parents to communicate or meet outside of group sessions helped foster supportive group relationships.
- Maintaining flexibility in allowing participants to communicate privately with practitioners, or in group settings, allowed parents to open up more effectively.

5.3.1 Session practicalities: Mode of delivery

Differences across providers and areas meant that while some parents were given a choice of delivery mode, others who would have preferred an alternative delivery mode were not given the option. There were benefits and drawbacks to both delivery modes (virtual, face to face) depending on the individual situations of parents. Flexibility in delivery was important for engagement with sessions. Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked in relation to mode of delivery.

Virtual delivery

The RPC interventions were designed to be delivered face to face; however, the COVID pandemic and lockdown led to a move to virtual delivery, and then to a more flexible approach. Most parents were comfortable with virtual delivery, but a common

concern mentioned by parents was that effective communication was not fully possible through a virtual medium:

“They can’t pick up on your body language [...] They have ‘active listening’ training [...] but you can’t see that through a laptop screen [...] in a group space you can’t control that [...] in a room you feel that.”

Male, Separated

Whilst other RPC evaluation research¹⁴ found that the vast majority (94%) of those who attended digitally found their technology worked well, technical issues were a problem for a few parents in this study, including participants not having the necessary hardware to be able to engage with the sessions, and connectivity issues, which interrupted the flow. The virtual interface could also lead to more distractions, especially when children were in the house during sessions.

“We were looking at a screen and we don’t have a great computer [...] We have constant thing around us as distractions. [...] It’s very hard to talk and concentrate online.”

Female, Intact

While the virtual interface led to anxiety for some, others found reassurance in this mode of delivery: the option to keep the video off and not always feel the pressure to contribute encouraged attendance for these participants.

Many also welcomed the convenience of virtual attendance; it allowed parents to fit the sessions around their other commitments and provided an opportunity to communicate with the other parent from separate spaces.

Face-to-face delivery

Some participants preferred face-to-face sessions over virtual, more commonly in the second recruitment cohort (February to August 2022) after COVID restrictions had eased and people were becoming increasingly comfortable being in physical proximity with each other. They felt the face-to-face option allowed more active participation and thought they would be less likely to open up online. Many of these participants appreciated the advantages of making eye contact and observing body language in the face-to-face environment, feeling this helped their engagement. Some also felt they absorbed the learning more easily in a face-to-face environment. Face-to-face group settings also meant participants were more easily able to support each other after sessions as they were less dispersed geographically.

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked for participants in relation to mode of delivery.

¹⁴ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

5.3.2 Session practicalities: Type of session

Individual and couples' sessions

Individual sessions and sessions for couples (intact or separated) were seen as personal conversations, which several parents likened to talking with a friend.

This helped build close relationships between practitioner and participant(s), and the focus of the sessions was on personal contexts and experiences without rigidly following a structure. A few participants thought that tailoring would have been too impractical in a larger group and elements may have been less relevant to participants' specific circumstances.

"I've had basically one-to-one counselling [...] for my personal situation [...] good to be able to talk [...] no end of stuff that I've had to deal with [...] having somebody that I can present that back to every week [...] invaluable."

Female, Separated

See Focus on: Couples' Sessions for further detail on the approach taken in these sessions (section 5.2.2)

Group sessions

Hearing from others in similar situations increased participants' confidence and allowed sharing of experiences, which meant participants could hear different perspectives and share advice. For many, the realisation that they were not alone was enough to boost confidence and reduce stress. This echoes other RPC evaluation research,¹⁵ which found that participants appreciated the 'sense of community' in group sessions.

"Made me realise I'm not alone in what I'm going through and been able to stay in touch with others from the group."

Male, Separated, **diary entry.**

A few participants felt nervous of the number of people in group sessions, meaning they were less likely to actively participate, but anxiety reduced as the weeks went on. Others did not feel comfortable sharing details of their personal lives with people they did not know and felt bigger personalities of the group overpowered those with less confidence.

"People need to really look at are people in an emotional state safe enough to go into that [...] like dragging up painful memories."

Male, Separated

¹⁵ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked to facilitate engagement and deliver group sessions and individual sessions.

5.3.3 Session practicalities: Session organisation

Some parents felt sessions were arranged to suit them, while others had to rearrange their commitments to be able to attend, for example, to ensure children were not present. Offering choice and flexibility based on individual need was key to maintaining engagement.

Scheduling sessions around work commitments was sometimes a challenge. Working parents sometimes found it difficult to be available for sessions, and couples with differing shift patterns in a few instances were unable to attend together.

“[Partner] only gets one weekday off a fortnight [...] I wasn’t getting [that day] off so that’s how we didn’t get it finished [...] They did try to be flexible but [we] could never do the ones together.”

Female, Intact

Some parents mentioned that sessions were draining when held in the evenings after work, particularly when they would need to cook dinner or put their children to bed post-session, which again impacted concentration and engagement.

“I do a night shift [...] sleep for about an hour then I do the course [...] like a zombie [...] sleep for another hour or two then I get the kids from school.”

Female, Separated

Some participants had sessions scheduled in advance while others booked as they went and rearranged as needed. A small number of parents did not know sessions had been rescheduled as the practitioner had only contacted one parent. If parents had missed a session, practitioners contacted them to catch them up and keep in touch, which allowed them to continue to engage.

Some parents had no final session scheduled, while others felt the practitioner wanted them ‘signed off,’ to finish the sessions. A few parents did not know whether the course had finished as it had not been explained to them, and they had not had a schedule of sessions booked in advance. For most parents, particularly those with other commitments, it was important for practitioners to understand individual needs and to therefore be flexible when organising sessions.

“I’m not clear on how many sessions I’m having or when this finishes [...] I don’t quite know what the aims are [...] there could have been some clearer messaging.”

Female, Separated

Intervention length and frequency

Some parents felt the interventions could have been longer, either due to changing circumstances or to allow for application and consolidation of session learning, while

others felt the interventions were too long, which impacted time spent with family, social or work commitments.

Differences in providers and availability across CPAs meant there was flexibility in the time between sessions for some, with a few participants having them more regularly at the beginning and then more infrequently. Others didn't have this flexibility and felt they would have benefitted from it, to allow time to consolidate and apply learning and reflect on positive changes.

“As things progressed I think every two weeks would have been better [...] It just felt like it came around too quickly because so much [going on] [...] things felt quite raw at times.”

Female, Intact

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked to ensure effective organisation of the intervention sessions.

5.4 Theme 4 – Disengagement

This section will focus on the reasons parents disengaged with or dropped out of interventions before completion, or found it hard to engage.

5.4.1 Disengagement: Key findings

- Ensuring parents had the tools to be able to attend and engage with session content, particularly where there were vulnerabilities, helped prevent attrition.
- Keeping session start dates as close to initial referral as possible helped ensure (continued) attendance.
- Pointing out the practical relevance of session content, and contextualising learning for parents where possible, helped keep parents engaged.
- Using relevant course materials (including workbooks and multi-media) where appropriate helped parents to consolidate learning from sessions.

5.4.2 Disengagement: Intervention attrition

Several issues led to parents not starting, postponing or disengaging from the interventions, broadly categorised into two themes: personal circumstances and organisational issues.

Personal circumstances

Amongst diary research participants, those who dropped out of an intervention had often attended one or two sessions before doing so. Changes in personal circumstances, including court outcomes, family bereavements, homelessness and separation, led to some participants postponing or dropping out of sessions.

Amongst those who disengaged, many felt that it was not worth continuing if they suspected the other parent was not attending; others disengaged once they found

out the other parent had. This corresponds with findings from the wider RPC evaluation,¹⁶ which found that reasons commonly given for not starting the programme included issues relating to the (ex-)partner, including unwillingness to engage, not thinking it would improve the relationship and ongoing legal proceedings. If there was lack of encouragement or flexibility from the practitioner, this made it easier for parents to disengage.

“The person running it said that we needed to stop moving it. She said unless we can pin it down, it’s not worth it.”

Male, Intact

Parents who disengaged from sessions often felt the content was not relevant to their circumstances. Those referred were sometimes taking part in multiple courses on parenting and felt the RPC session content was too similar.

For parents going through court over access disputes, some felt the course was poorly timed, not accounting for the impact the sessions would have on outcomes, or vice versa.

“She just didn’t turn up.” ... “If it had happened before the final hearing then she may have turned up [...] as soon as [court] was over she wasn’t interested.”

Male, Separated

Organisational issues

Some participants had to wait for a start date as there was no space on sessions. While some felt the practitioner tried to be flexible with session scheduling, others felt frustrated by repeated cancellations by the provider and consequently dropped out.

As RPC interventions are not designed to support those experiencing domestic abuse, if participants reported a change in the conflict which amounted to assault or domestic abuse, they were no longer eligible to take part; this was explained by a few parents during recruitment to the research. These participants were signposted to other targeted support.

Refer to the tables in section 5 of the annexe for a summary of what worked to facilitate engagement with sessions and prevent attrition.

5.4.3 Disengagement: Session relevance

A small number of parents found parts of their course irrelevant – for example, sessions around divorce for those who had not been married, or sessions focusing on parenting and communication strategies suitable for neurotypical children, which would not apply to their children. Some felt the support was more relevant for the

¹⁶ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: Final evaluation report, London: Department for Work and Pensions

other parent, or felt they already displayed the behaviours that the sessions were trying to encourage and felt patronised.

“I said to the social services [...] ‘you’ve seen my responses, I don’t bite back so I don’t know why I need to go on the course’.”

Male, Separated

A few parents started the sessions feeling that they had little to learn and ended up taking a lot more from the sessions than they had anticipated.

“I enjoyed the sessions because they came up with things you wouldn’t necessarily think about [...] it opens up your eyes to a lot more than you’d think.”

Female, Separated

5.5 Intervention journeys: process and content: conclusions

Referral

RPC participants generally felt well-informed on the reasons for their referral and the purpose of the intervention. Separate conversations with each parent during the referral process helped both engage, and parents who were aware of the other parent’s referral to sessions and agreement to participate (where applicable) tended to engage better with the process. Participants were referred onto sessions through a variety of routes, including through children’s social care, via court recommendation, and through self-referral. Occasionally parents were unaware of the precise nature of RPC support before they started sessions. Those recommended through the courts were not always given clear information.

Session content and delivery

Most session content across RPC interventions focused on tools and learning to improve communication and goodwill in the parental relationships. A secondary focus of sessions was on parent–child and wider family relationships. Another focus of sessions was emotional regulation and wellbeing, and for some of our parents in the most hostile relationships with their ex-partners, this was the principal element of support.

Both separated and intact parents learned constructive communication skills, including listening to the other parent and reflecting on their perspective, taking care with manner and tone, and approaching difficult conversations differently.

For intact couples, practitioners encouraging them to make time for each other often had immediate positive outcomes for relationship warmth. For separated couples, learning to self-reflect and taking time to consider the other parent’s perspective reduced feelings of hostility towards the other parent for many, and even increased positive feelings for some.

Teaching parents about self-care and the positive effects this would have on their children encouraged them to actively work on improving their wellbeing.

Most participants responded favourably to RPC practitioners and their approaches. Parents were more engaged with intervention content when practitioners took time to build rapport. For some, the personal characteristics of the practitioner were important in helping to build trust and rapport.

Session practicalities

Tailoring and adapting session length and frequency – and intervention timing – to suit changing circumstances and personal preferences helped maintain engagement.

Sharing experiences was highly beneficial for many, boosting confidence and reducing stress. For those in need of a safe, dedicated space to have meaningful conversations with the other parent, couples' sessions were more appropriate. The minority of participants referred to one-to-one support appreciated this as a form of what they often described as counselling or therapy, tailored to their needs.

Session disengagement

Parents disengaged with interventions when they did not feel content was relevant or tailored to their circumstances – or was ill-timed. Some were unwilling to engage with the other parent, were unsure that the other parent was engaging, or felt the support was not able to improve their situation.

Finally, for some parents, making mid-term progress in desired RPC outcomes, and engaging with RPC support, was more challenging. This applied in cases where contextual factors made their needs and the needs of their families more complex, for example, where acrimonious disputes over finances or child access were in progress; where complicated household structures and networks were in place; where mental and physical health conditions played a part; and where the level of hostility in the parental relationship was extremely high. In these cases, sensitivity to session timing, flexibility in session practicalities and content, signposting to additional provision and a focus on emotional regulation support all played an important role.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This chapter summarises what worked well during each part of the RPC journey for the parents included in this research. Please refer to section 5 of the annexe for a more detailed account of what worked in relation to each part of the support that parents received.

6. Conclusions

Embedded into parents' experience of and engagement with RPC interventions were the personal contextual factors that they presented with at the time of referral and during participation. Contextual factors included, but were not limited to, the nature of the parental relationship (intact or separated), mental and physical health, financial stress or conflict, child access issues and household composition and networks. Participant experience of the support also depended greatly on the nature and intensity of the conflict.

The support provided was helpful when it related and adapted to the circumstances of participants, and participation was hindered when parents felt their support needs were more complex than interventions were able to accommodate.

6.1 Referral

Parents who attended together or communicated with one another about their involvement often felt more positive about their referral and were therefore more likely to report positive outcomes. Knowledge of the other parent's involvement was very important, particularly for separated parents.

Parents who were given clear information about the sessions, including intervention aims, and were offered the chance to ask questions prior to a referral, often engaged in sessions for longer. Those whose referral was recommended by courts were least likely to understand how the intervention could help them and were not always aware of how to self-refer.

6.2 Session content and delivery

Many participants involved in this study reported considerable improvements in communication and/or goodwill in their relationship with the other parent, sometimes seeing these improvements at a very early stage in their RPC journey; most often, it was intact parents in couples' sessions who saw the biggest improvements. This is

echoed in wider evaluation findings,¹⁷ where intact parents usually experienced greater improvements than separated parents immediately following an intervention.

The diary research found more measured success in these areas for other parents (both intact and separated), for example, where some improvements were made in practical communications around childcare, or efforts were made to temper the conflict around children. For a few separated parents, the nature of their conflict with the other parent was such that the interventions only had a very limited impact on interparental conflict. For these participants, the interventions often had most impact where the support focused on coping mechanisms and emotional regulation.

6.3 Session practicalities

Flexibility was important for maintaining engagement, including the mode, length and frequency of sessions, and offering extensions to interventions where appropriate.

6.4 Attrition and engagement

Parents disengaged with interventions when they were not tailored to their circumstances, for example, due to practical barriers to taking part, because they were unwilling to engage with the other parent or unsure of the other parent's participation, or because they could not see how the support would improve their situation.

6.5 Concluding remarks

The evaluation of the effects of the seven interventions tested under the 2018–22 RPC programme¹⁸ demonstrated that many parents experienced improvements in their relationship with the other parent, and the mental health of their children improved. The diary research complements the wider evaluation by (i) providing evidence on how these outcomes were achieved in the short term, and (ii) identifying those areas that pose a greater challenge for RPC support.

The evidence suggests that for many of the parents participating in the diary study, the individual interventions worked as intended (i.e. they did what they are designed to do, such as helping parents to appreciate the other parent's perspective). This report provides insight into what worked, in which circumstances, and for whom, highlighting the nuances inherent in individual journeys and demonstrating both progress and pitfalls.

As the interventions test ended in 2022, this research provides any organisations involved in delivering these interventions with helpful insight into the aspects of the support that parents appreciated and needed to be able to engage with the provision and fully benefit as parents and/or (ex-)partners.

¹⁷ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: An evaluation of the effects of interventions on parental relationships and children, London: Department for Work and Pensions

¹⁸ DWP (2023) Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018–2022: An evaluation of the effects of interventions on parental relationships and children, London: Department for Work and Pensions

Annexe

1. Literature review

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that interparental conflict adversely affects children's emotional, behavioural, social, academic and intergenerational relationship development. This indicates that the couple relationship is an important site for early intervention and has implications for a wide range of policy areas from effective approaches to child mental health to managing child behaviours. (Harold, G.T., Acquah, D., Chowdry, H. and Sellers, R., 2016).

It has been found that intervention programmes that target parent-child processes in the context of acrimonious interparental conflict at the relationship level may pay significant long-term dividends in reducing cross-government and social costs associated with poor child mental health and extended outcomes (Harold, G.T. and Sellers, R., 2018).

The international evidence on the efficacy of interventions that target interparental conflict is substantial, but largely comprises traditional evaluation research with quantitative measurement of the effects of these interventions on different aspects of the interparental relationship and sometimes child wellbeing. Few, if any, studies have involved following parents whilst they participate in interventions and monitoring how family life is affected.

To support the development of a suitable approach, the DWP Library Services Team conducted two literature searches covering the use of diary-based methods and social media analysis in social research. The first search consulted 4 databases: DWP research library catalogue, EBSCO Discovery, Google (Scholar) and IDOX. Search terms included: ethnographic; research; methods/methodology; techniques; strategies; best practices; non-text; video; image; photo; picture; multi-media; media; diary/diaries; analysis; reporting. This yielded 44 books, journals and articles considered relevant for this research, which were reviewed and shared based on relevance to the literature request. The library team summarised that articles looking at the use of diaries within research tended to discuss their use in the context within a particular research study, rather than evaluate the use of diaries in their own right. There were several papers which discussed the challenges involved in recruiting, engaging and retaining both mothers and fathers as participants in longitudinal studies, mainly in the US. Some papers addressed research involving specific groups of parents, including parents from ethnic minorities, parents from low-income backgrounds, vulnerable parents, pregnant and new mothers, mothers at risk of substance abuse, and adolescent mothers.

The second literature search conducted on social media analysis consulted 4 databases: DWP research library catalogue, EBSCO Discovery, Google (Scholar)

and IDOX. Search terms included: ethnographic; research; methods/methodology; techniques; strategies; best practices; non-text; video; image; photo; picture; multi-media; media; diary/diaries; analysis; reporting. This yielded 39 books, journals and articles considered relevant for this research, which were reviewed and shared based on relevance to the literature request, focused on analysis and reporting.

2. Sampling

The sample was drawn from administrative data provided to DWP by local authorities on individuals referred to the interventions. The total sample drawn across both recruitment cohorts was 742 (341 in first sample and 401 in second). The samples were drawn in two recruitment cohorts, the first in November 2021 and the second in February 2022. This meant researchers were better equipped to gather participants as close to the start of their interventions as possible.

Achieving good representation across participant characteristics was important to gather insight into how contexts and characteristics impacted participant experience of the interventions. Participant gender, relationship status, referral status (as a couple or individual) and intervention were monitored, and recruitment was targeted where possible to ensure important characteristics were represented in the sample.

An exemption was requested and approved to not exclude participants in this research from follow up research with external contractors at the end of the intervention to avoid compromising either study and obtain the most appropriate sample group.

The research aimed to achieve a sample of 40 participants. To account for attrition due to the longitudinal nature of the study, 45 parents were recruited at the initial interview stage.

2.1 Sample characteristics

The sample characteristics are reported here to give a sense of the spread of characteristics across the diary research sample. While the research aimed to recruit participants from across all reported characteristics, it did not aim for a representative sample.

Table 1. Total number of achieved sample per wave

Recruitment Cohort	
First Cohort (Nov 21)	21
Second Cohort (Feb 22)	24
Total	45

Sample characteristics include those who completed at least 1 interview (including subsequent dropouts).

22 parents were receiving support through Tavistock Relationships, 15 through Twin Training and 8 from Relate.

As MBT received the highest number of referrals during the lifetime of the programme, almost half of the diary research participants participated in MBT. The remainder participated in the other interventions in roughly similar numbers apart from Within My Reach and Family Check-up (only one parent participated in FCU).

Table 2. Total participants by referral status

Referral Status	Number of participants
With Partner	20
Not Known	25
Total	45

13 of the research participants were living together (but not married) and 19 were separated, 11 were married or in a civil partnership, and one parent was divorced. These labels do not indicate whether a participant was still in a relationship with the other parent at different stages throughout the research, so the analysis considered relationship status in terms of whether they were ‘intact’ (still in a relationship) or ‘separated’ (including divorced). This status was established by researchers through confirmation with the participant during the research.

Table 3. Total participants by gender

Gender	Number of participants
Male	16
Female	29
Total	45

Table 4. Total participants by disability status

Disability	Number of participants
Yes	10
No	33
Prefer not to say	2
Total	45

Table 5. Total participants by child maintenance service (CMS) status

CMS Status	Number of participants
Parent With Care	3
Non-Resident Parent	5
Not on CMS	37
Total	45

34 of the research participants were “English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British”; the remaining 11 participants were drawn in roughly equal numbers from other ethnic groups.

2.2 Response rates

Table 6. Response rates based on initial calls made and subsequent completion of interviews or diary uploads

Recruitment Cohort	Initial recruitment calls made	First interviews completed	Number of participants who uploaded to app	Final interviews completed
First Cohort (Nov 21)	280	21	13	14
Second Cohort (Feb 22)	427	24	16	19
Total	707	45	29	33

3. Interventions evaluated

- **Family Check-up:** This is a targeted selective intervention delivered to individual parents (either one or both parents). Family Check-up is a strengths-based, family-centred intervention that motivates parents to use parenting practices to support child competence, mental health, and risk reduction (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).
- **Family Transitions Triple P:** Family Transitions Triple P (FTTP) Level 5 was designed as an intensive intervention for parents experiencing difficulties because of separation or divorce. This is a targeted selective intervention, delivered in a group format. Ex-partners do not attend sessions together. If both ex-partners want to attend the intervention, they should attend

separately. The intervention focuses on developing skills to resolve conflicts with former partners and learning how to cope positively with stress (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).

- **Incredible Years Advanced:** This is a targeted indicated intervention, delivered to parents and their children in a group format. Both parents can attend, however in practice it is acceptable for only one parent to attend. The programme focuses on parents' interpersonal issues such as effective communication and problem-solving skills, anger, depression management, and ways to give and get support (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).
- **Enhanced Triple P:** This is a targeted selective intervention, delivered to individual parents (either one or both parents). The intervention aims to address family factors that may impact upon and complicate the task of parenting, such as parental mood and partner conflict, and problem child behaviours (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).
- **Mentalization Based Therapy:** This is a targeted indicated intervention, delivered to couples who are no longer in an intact relationship (i.e. separated or divorced). This intervention was specifically designed for separated or divorced parents in entrenched conflict over matters to do with their children who have used the court system to try resolve the disputes over contact and residency. Parents who are unable to resolve their disputes amicably but have not yet been in court and whose children are symptomatic are also eligible. Parents should not be living together, or be in a current relationship with each other, but should be willing to attend some therapy sessions together, with a willingness to think together about how they parent their children. Mentalization Based Therapy – Parenting Under Pressure is designed to reduce entrenched conflict and levels of anger and emotional dysregulation between parents, thereby enabling them to understand the damaging effects of their conflicts on their child. The intervention targets both parents' capacity for mentalization and reflective thought, and crucially challenges the malign assumptions parents make about each other's intentions behind their actions, which can lead to high levels of anger (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).
- **Parenting When Separated:** This is a targeted selective intervention for children between the ages of 0 and 18 years, whose parents are preparing for, going through, or have gone through a separation or divorce. The intervention is designed for both mothers and fathers, and for custodial and non-custodial parents. Separated parents usually do not attend the intervention together. The sessions tend to be quite practical, covering a range of topics, including solving co-parenting problems, coping with the emotional impact of separation, helping children to cope, and improving communication with the child and co-parent. The intervention activities seek to help parents develop better communication and conflict resolution skills, as well as positive self-care and parenting skills, with a view to enhancing parent

and family functioning to promote children’s resiliency (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).

- **Within My Reach:** This is a targeted selective intervention, delivered in a group format to individuals (i.e. not couples), including low-income single parents, who may or may not be in a relationship. This intervention was thus designed for all adults; participants therefore don’t have to have a child or be parents. The intervention therefore targets relationship outcomes in general, rather than specifically focusing on parenting or parental conflict. Within My Reach aims to equip low-income and at-risk individuals with relationship skills, and to promote healthy relationships. Sessions cover 3 themes: Building Relationships, Maintaining Relationships, and Making Relationship Decisions (Early Intervention Foundation, 2017).

4. Topic guides and diary prompts

4.1 Topic guides

There were two interviews for the project, with a researcher briefing and topic guide for each. Both topic guides were semi-structured, but the second required additional tailoring for individuals in accordance with uploads they had made to the diary application.

4.1.1 RPC diary research initial interview topic guide

INTERVIEWER NOTE:

The parents you will be contacting do not know this programme by the name ‘reducing parental conflict’. Please do not use this phrase when referring to the specific programme or interventions. It is fine to use the term ‘conflict’ in the context of some of the interview questions, as the conversations are very likely to turn in that direction and some acknowledgement of conflict is inevitable.

The questions are here as a guide to ensure all info is gathered, but they may not naturally come up in this order. Feel free to adjust the order and wording as feels natural to you, but please aim to include all the questions where relevant.

Section 1: Household composition

INTERVIEWER NOTE: this section is about family and household composition. Remember some parents may have one or more children who live mainly with them, AND one or more that live mainly with the other parent. You may need to adapt your questioning accordingly. Where children come up in the interview, ensure you are clear on which children are being discussed: there may be other children involved that are not the interviewee’s children, e.g. a new partner’s

children that the interviewee now lives with. Be as clear as possible about the home set up when interviewing and notetaking. We're mainly interested in the impacts on the interviewee's own children, but the presence of other children may provide important context.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Mimic interviewee's way of referring to the other parent if appropriate.

To start, I'd like to get an idea of who is in your family. Who lives with you in your house?

- Children: ages (determine whether these are interviewee's own children, step children, new partner's children, etc.)
- Other adults, and their relationship to interviewee / children

How long have you or did you live(d) with [OTHER PARENT]?

IF SEPARATED: how long have you been separated?

IF CHILDREN LIVE WITH INTERVIEWEE: Does the other parent live nearby and how frequently do they see the children? Where do they most regularly see their children?

Do you have any (other) children who do not live with you? IF YES:

- Who do they live with?
- How frequently do you see them?
- Where do you most regularly spend time with your children?

How did you and [OTHER PARENT] decide upon the amount of time you each spend with your children?

PROMPT IF NECESSARY ON TYPE OF ARRANGEMENT:

- Arrangement agreed informally by parents
- Mediation involved?
- Used any tools for agreeing routine of care, e.g. the Parenting Plan?
- Court order?

Is there anyone else who regularly spends time with your children?

Who are they/what is their relationship to the child?

How regularly?

Where do they most regularly spend time with your children?

Section 2: Interparental relationship/family stress

INTERVIEWER NOTE: This section is about how things were at the time that the interviewee was referred to the sessions. A later section asks how they have been feeling since being referred/beginning the sessions.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Be aware of any Domestic Abuse (DA)/Domestic Violence (DV) comments that may arise during this section e.g. I stopped attending as a result of partner finding out.

I'd now like to ask you a few questions about your family relationships. These **help us to understand your situation and how it relates to the support sessions. As with all of the questions in this interview, you don't have to share anything that you don't want to share, and you can refuse to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with.**

Can I ask how you were feeling about your relationship with [OTHER PARENT] before you were referred to the [preferred intervention name] sessions?

- Can you talk a bit about what was going on in the run up to the sessions?
- Did you feel supported **in your relationship?**

Did you ever experience disagreements?

SENSITIVELY EXPLORE:

- Did you/How did you show you disagreed?
- How often did you find you disagreed?
- What happened when you disagreed?
- Did you ever struggle to understand each other's point of view?
- Did you usually disagree about the same kinds of things? A variety of things?
- Did this cause arguments?

SENSITIVELY EXPLORE:

- How would you describe these arguments/how often?
- Did either of you become very angry?
- Did you ever ignore or stop talking to each other?
- What impact did this have on you?
- What impact did this have on your partner?

IF INTERVIEWEE HAS CHILDREN (RPC participants might be pregnant with no children yet), SENSITIVELY EXPLORE:

What was this like for your children?

- Have either of you spoken to your children about disagreements or arguments? Have they brought it up with you?
- Has it impacted how often they see you/[other parent]/extended family?
- Effect on school attendance?

- Change in behaviour (home/school)?

IF DIVORCED/SEPARATED:

How have your children reacted to the separation / divorce?

- Has this had any further impact on your relationship with [OTHER PARENT]
- How has this affected your relationship with your children?
- [OTHER PARENT]'s relationship with your children?

IF EXPECTING CHILD:

How do you think this could impact your future?

SENSITIVELY: Impact on child in future

IF HAVE CHILDREN:

(IF INTERVIEWEE LIVES **WITH CHILDREN**) Do you receive any financial support for your children, e.g. child maintenance?

Is this through the Child Maintenance Service, or do you have a more informal arrangement with [OTHER PARENT]?

(IF INTERVIEWEE DOES NOT LIVE WITH CHILDREN): Do you pay any financial support for your children, e.g. child maintenance?

Is this through the Child Maintenance Service, or do you have a more informal arrangement with [OTHER PARENT]?

(IF YES) Have child maintenance arrangements played a part in the conflict between you and [OTHER PARENT]?

In what way?

Were arrangements regarding child maintenance a *cause* or a *result* of the difficulties you were experiencing in your relationship?

IF HAVE CHILDREN AND **NOT LIVING TOGETHER**:

Did disagreements over the amount of time your children spent with you or [OTHER PARENT] play any part in the conflict?

In what way?

Were access arrangements a *cause* or a *result* of the difficulties you were experiencing in your relationship?

Section 3: Referral to RPC intervention

I'd like to talk now about how you came to be referred onto [intervention name].

How did you find out about [preferred intervention name]?

- Who referred you? (probe for information on frontline practitioner job titles, in what capacity they were in contact with them)
- When were you referred?
- Why do you think you were referred?
- Was [OTHER PARENT] also referred to these sessions? Are they aware that you are attending the sessions?

What were you told about the sessions before you agreed to them?

- Who first explained the sessions to you?
- How were the sessions explained to you?
- What information were you given? How? (e.g. over the phone, via email, face-to-face)
- Did you feel you were given all the information you needed? Would anything else have been helpful?
- Did you have any questions? What were they? Were they answered?
- Do you feel you had enough information to make a decision about taking part in the sessions?

How did you feel about the idea of the sessions when they were first mentioned?

- Why did you feel this way?
- In what ways did you think the sessions might benefit you?
- Did you have any concerns about the sessions?
- How did [OTHER PARENT] feel about the sessions?

Section 4: Hopes and aspirations

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Here, we're interested in both the kind of support they are hoping for (mechanisms that will lead to outcomes) and the specific changes they are hoping this will lead to (outcomes).

What are you hoping to get out of the sessions?

- What kind of support do you hope to/expect to receive?
- What changes are you hoping for? For whom? Why?
- Impact of session on children?

(Prompts if not forthcoming: changes could be around managing emotions, resolving conflict without arguing, understanding each other, lower stress, improvement in children's behaviour, happier children etc. You could prompt based on specific information the interviewee has given on their relationship/conflict with the other parent)

- [IF RELEVANT] And what do you think [OTHER PARENT] is hoping to get out of the sessions?
- [IF RELEVANT] How do you feel about [OTHER PARENT] taking part in the sessions?

Section 5: Feelings at start of journey

INTERVIEWER NOTE: THIS SECTION ONLY APPLIES IF THE INTERVIEWEE HAS ALREADY TAKEN PART IN AT LEAST ONE RPC SESSION

You said you have already attended one or more sessions for [preferred intervention name]. What do you think about them so far?

- Have the session(s) met your expectations so far? How?
- How are the sessions delivered (virtually, f2f?) Where do they take place? Does this suit you?
- Are the sessions private (just you, or you and your (ex)partner) or are you taking part as part of a bigger group? How do you find the group sessions (probe on group dynamic, whether the format is helpful)
- What do you think of the practitioner who leads the sessions? (Prompt around their capability/expertise, manner, whether they understand the participant. Any negatives?)
- How has/have the first session(s) made you feel about the future? (Prompts if not forthcoming: optimistic, pessimistic, hopeful?)

IF REFERRED WITH OTHER PARENT: Do you know how [other parent] has found the sessions so far?

How easy is it for you to attend the sessions?

For example, in relation to time, location of the sessions, childcare?

We've come to the end of my questions now, but before we finish, is there anything else about you, your family, or the sessions that you'd like to share?

IF COMPLETED DOWNLOAD OF APP, CONTINUE TO A

IF NOT COMPLETED DOWNLOAD OF APP, CONTINUE TO B

A - Thank you for your time, just to let you know we'll email your voucher within 28 days. You'll see you have new tasks every two weeks for the diary entry. If you make sure notifications are allowed, you'll see when there is a new one. Do you have any questions?

4.1.2 RPC Diary research final interview topic guide

INTERVIEWER NOTE:

The parents you will be contacting do not know this programme by the name 'reducing parental conflict'. Please do not use this phrase when referring to the specific programme or interventions. It is fine to use the term 'conflict' in the context of some of the interview questions, as the conversations are very likely to turn in that direction and some acknowledgement of conflict is inevitable.

The questions are here as a guide to ensure all info is gathered, but they may not naturally come up in this order. Feel free to adjust the order and wording as feels natural to you, but please aim to include all the questions where relevant.

Section 1: Diary Entries - General

INTERVIEWER NOTE: this section is a gentle introduction to our questions around the diary uploads, starting more generally. It is also where we will be collecting participants' views on using the app, and the different upload modes, as part of our evaluation into the use of diary apps for social research in DWP.

Mimic interviewee's way of referring to the other parent if appropriate.

To start, I'd like to get a general idea of how you felt about uploading your entries to the diary app.

How easy did you find it using the diary app?

- Did you have a preferred way of making your diary entries [e.g. photo, video, text]? Why?
- Was there any way of making your entries which you didn't like [e.g. photo, video, text]? Why?
- Did using the diary app encourage you to share things you might not have shared otherwise? (IF YES) What kinds of things?
- Was there any topic that you did not feel comfortable covering in your diary entries?
- How has recording your thoughts affected you?

Does any particular entry stick out in your mind? Why?

- How representative are the uploads you shared to your day-to-day life?
- Are there any entries that you think would be very different if you were to upload them again now?
- Why did you choose to share what you did with us?

Is there anything you want to share now that you don't think is shown from your entries?

Comparing your first entry with your last entry, what was the same and what was different? [interviewers to give brief description of these entries]

How did you feel when you uploaded your first entry? How do you feel now? How has that affected you?

Did you use the app more or less than you expected? Why do you think this is?

USING APP LESS THAN EXPECTED: limits on time, privacy, usability, finding a comfortable time and place, willingness to share personal information.

USING APP MORE THAN EXPECTED: forming a habit, enjoying the chance to open up, easy to open up on an app (easier or harder than opening up in an interview?)

Section 2: Diary Entries – Specific

INTERVIEWER NOTE: this section is about the individual uploads to Indeemo that the participant made during the interventions. Because all uploads will vary greatly in nature and detail, you'll need to be flexible in this section. **You will need to adapt your questioning** depending on the type and amount of uploads, and make a judgement as to the relevance of each prompt in the light of the information already elicited via prompts in the app and the analysis you conducted during the research.

Before the interview, please complete the diary entry descriptions in the columns below, for the ones you have decided to probe on. (The participant might have made fewer than eight entries and you should aim to select **no more than 3 or 4 entries** for further probing during the interview). Please ensure the description is brief but sufficiently descriptive so that you and the participant are aware of which upload you are discussing (some example descriptions are given below). NOTE: This part of the interview should take **around 30 minutes**.

Example descriptions: 'Communication with the other parent being bad, your calls being ignored and slow responses to texts.' 'A photo of a hole in the wall. You captioned that your child punched the wall.' 'You talking to the camera sitting on a sofa, explaining that other parent is ignoring calls and responding to texts really slowly.'

NOTETAKER NOTE: Please copy and paste the blue table so you have one for each diary entry discussed. Please ensure you clearly mark the relevant diary task number at the top of the table.

Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
<description>	<description>	<description>	<description>	<description>	<description>	<description>	<description>

I'm now going to ask you a few questions about some of the diary uploads that you made on the Indeemo app. As always, you don't have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with, and we can take a break at any time.

IF PARTICIPANT CONFIRMED IN THE INTRO THAT THEY HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR UPLOADS ON INDEEMO: If you could log into your Indeemo account, we can look at your entries for each task as we go along. This might help our discussion.

[If the participant is on their smartphone, they should be able to put their audio on 'speaker' so that they can access the app entries and continue with the interview simultaneously - NOTE: Participant's may not be comfortable on speaker phone, in which case allow some time for them to look at entries prior to interview]

ENTRY NUMBER:

Your <Task n> entry was a <photo, video, text> upload.

IF TEXT:

You wrote about <description>

IF PHOTO:

In the photo, I can see <description>

IF VIDEO:

The video was of <description>, where you spoke about/showed me <description>

Can you describe what you uploaded to me?

- Why did you choose to share this particular experience?

WHERE RELEVANT:

- Was there anything else happening in your life at the time, outside of what you <described/showed>?
- Was this a normal day for you?
- Where were you?
- Who else was involved/there?
- What did you want to tell us in this entry about your relationship with <your family/other parent/children> at the time?
- how were the support sessions going at the time?
- Is there anything you didn't <tell/show> me that you would like to share now?

Why did you choose to make your diary entry via <photo/video/text>?

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF A DETAILED CAPTION WAS INCLUDED WITH A PHOTO UPLOAD, IT MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE TO ASK THE 'TEXT' PROMPTS TOO]

IF TEXT:

- Where were you when you wrote this entry?
- Did you write the entry immediately after <experience described in text>, or did you wait a while? Why?
- Did you upload the entry straightaway after writing it, or did you wait a while? Why?

IF VIDEO:

- How did you record the video (e.g. via smartphone?)
 - Who recorded the video?
 - Where were you?
- Did you record the video immediately after <experience described in video>, or did you wait a while? Why?
- Did you upload the video straightaway after filming, or did you wait a while? Why?

IF PHOTO:

- Why did you choose to share this particular photo?
- What does the photo show? Please describe it to me.
- What message were you trying to get across by sharing this photo?
- How did you take this photo (e.g. via smartphone?)
 - Who took the photo?
 - Where were you?

- Did you upload the photo straightaway after taking it, or did you wait a while? Why?
- Was anybody else present when you took the photo?
- Did you consider sharing any other photos?

ASK ALL:

- Was anyone else with you when you prepared your uploads?

IF APPROPRIATE:

How did you feel when you were making this entry?

- How did you feel when sharing the experience through the app?
- IF REVELANT/APPROPRIATE: You did not say these were your feelings at the time – why is this?

IF YOUR INTERPRETATION OF HOW THE PARTICIPANT WAS FEELING DIFFERS FROM WHAT THEY SAY: When I saw the <photo/entry/video>, I thought you seemed <adjective to describe emotion>. Do you think that's accurate? Why/why not?

Section 3: Interparental relationship/family stress

INTERVIEWER NOTE: This section is about **how things might have changed** since the participant has been on the sessions.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Please refer to the notes from the previous interview with the participant so that you can adapt the questioning as appropriate (e.g. whether receiving/paying maintenance, living with/not living with children)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Be aware of any Domestic Abuse (DA)/Domestic Violence (DV) comments that may arise during this section e.g. I stopped attending as a result of partner finding out.

I'd now like to ask you a few questions about your family relationships. These help us to understand your situation and how it relates to the support sessions. As with all of the questions in this interview, you don't have to share anything that you don't want to share, and you can refuse to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with.

How has your relationship with <other parent> changed since attending the <preferred intervention name> sessions?

- [IF PARTICIPANT THINKS THINGS HAVE CHANGED]: What do you think influenced this change?

How do you think your/<other parent>'s behaviour is different since the sessions?

IF CHILDREN: What about in front of the children?

Is there any difference in how often you and <other parent> disagree now, compared with before the sessions?

- What do you disagree about? Why do you think this is?

- When discussing parenting, how often does it lead to arguments?
- Do you think you understand each other differently from before? In what way?
- How do these disagreements affect you now? How is this different from before?
- How do these disagreements affect <other parent>?

[Prompts may include parenting style, communication, values, quality time, mindset]

(ASK ALL) How do you think your family's future might be different now? Why?

- If you were to make one more entry, what would it be like?

IF INTERVIEWEE HAS CHILDREN:

Have you noticed any changes in your relationship with your child(ren) more recently? How have things changed? Why do you think this is?

- How have any changes in your relationship with <other parent> affected your children? Has it affected:
 - your/<other parent's> relationship with your children?
 - your child(ren)'s behaviour / wellbeing?
- Has anybody else commented on changes with you or your child(ren) recently?
- Did you tell your child(ren) about the sessions? Have they spoken to you?

IF DIVORCED/SEPARATED:

How are your child(ren) feeling about the separation/divorce?

- Have there been any changes since the sessions?

IF INTERVIEWEE HAS CHILDREN:

Have there been any changes to any financial support <you pay/you receive> for your child(ren) since the sessions?

Have there been any changes to the amount of time you/<other parent> spend(s) with your child(ren)?

When you need help with the child(ren), how do you ask for it from <other parent>?

IF THERE HAVE BEEN ANY CHANGES (e.g. with respect to relationships, conflict, financial or access arrangements):

Do you think these changes would have come about without the support sessions? Why is that?

Section 4: The Sessions

What did you think of the sessions?

CONTENT:

- Did they meet your expectations? In what way did they / did they not meet expectations?
- What kind of support did you receive? How is this similar or different to what you expected to get out of the sessions before you started?
- What do you think is the most important thing you took away from sessions / applied to your everyday life?
- What did you think of the practitioner(s) running the sessions?
- Was it the same practitioner all the way through?

FORMAT AND PRACTICALITIES:

- What did you think about the format (e.g. one-on-one, 2-1, group sessions)? Did the format help/hinder progress?
- How appropriate was:
 - the length of the sessions
 - the frequency of the sessions
 - the number of weeks you attended

Where the sessions took place

If you could change anything about the sessions, what would you change and why?

- How do you think this would improve the support or sessions?

Why did you choose this change/these changes?

Section 4a: FOR THOSE WHO FINISHED INTERVENTIONS EARLY ONLY

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Be aware of any Domestic Abuse (DA)/Domestic Violence (DV) comments that may arise during this section e.g. I stopped attending as a result of partner finding out.

Now I'd like to talk a bit about the sessions ending before we expected, if that's OK.

At what point did you know that you were no longer going to attend the sessions?

- How far into the sessions were you? How many did you have left?

Was there a particular event that triggered this?

What is the reason that you stopped attending the sessions?

- Was there anything that influenced you to make this decision?
- How did your experience of the sessions change from the start to when you decided to stop?

Were there any barriers to you attending the sessions?

What could have encouraged you to stick with the sessions?

- Could the practitioner have done anything differently?

What else would you have liked to have learned?

Section 4b: FOR THOSE CONTINUING INTERVENTIONS BEYOND 10 INDEEMO TASKS

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Adapt these questions as suitable to the uploads made by participant

I'd like to talk a little more about the sessions you have remaining.

At what point did you know you wanted to extend, or hear about the option of extending?

- Who suggested extending the sessions? How did it come about?
- When did you know that there was an option to extend sessions?

Was there a particular event that triggered this?

Can you talk me through the process of getting some additional sessions?

- Was this discussed with anyone outside of the sessions?
- Did you have to complete any additional paperwork?
- Is there a set amount of additional sessions, or are they just ongoing for as long as needed?

How do the sessions differ from the first [N/few] that you had?

- Is there any difference in the content of the sessions from before?
- Is there any difference in the length of the sessions, or time between them?

How has your relationship with your practitioner changed?

What do you hope to gain from these additional sessions?

- Has this changed from before you knew you were having additional sessions? How?

What are your child(ren)'s other parent views on having additional sessions?

We've come to the end of my questions now, but before we finish, is there anything else about you, your family, or the sessions that you'd like to share?

4.2 Diary prompts

Diary prompts were sent out to participants via the Indeemo Ltd. application push notification every 2 weeks. The start dates of the target groups were a few days apart, allowing for people to receive their first prompt as close to completion of first interview (and the start of their sessions) as possible.

1. How do you feel communication is going with your child(ren) and child(ren)'s other parent at the moment? Why?
2. Can you tell us about a time from the last 2 weeks when you've handled a difficult situation?
3. Have you put anything from the relationship sessions into practice over the last two weeks? Please tell us how you think it went, and if you would do it again.

4. What do you hope will change as a result of taking part in the relationship sessions? In your view, how likely is it that these changes will happen?
5. How has balancing family, leisure, and any other commitments (e.g. work) been for you these last 2 weeks?
6. What is the most valuable thing that you've taken from the sessions? And what has been the least useful thing?
7. Think back to a challenge you had in your relationship before your sessions started, or at the beginning of the sessions. Is there anything you would do differently now? What would you do and why?
8. What are the most important things you would like us to know about your experiences or the sessions?
9. Thinking about your child(ren), is there anything you've noticed that is different since starting the sessions and if so, what are they? If not, why do you think this might be?
10. Can you tell us about a time recently where something positive has happened in your relationship with your child(ren) or child(ren)'s other parent? Why do you feel positively about this event?

4.3 Coding framework

4.3.1 Coding and thematic development

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe six key steps involved in thematic analysis, and the approach to the cross-sectional element of data analysis for this research aligns with these steps: (1) familiarising oneself with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (cited in Maguire, M. & Dalahunt, B., 2017). A combination of deductive and inductive approaches was used in coding and theme development. An initial coding framework was developed with definitions coded based on the research aims, knowledge of the RPC programme and its aims¹⁹, and initial familiarisation with the data from the first recruitment cohort of the study. The initial coding framework was refined in an iterative process as fieldwork and preliminary analysis progressed. During this process, researchers made coding-related observations and suggestions for changes to the framework in a reflexive log which was discussed within the team frequently. Changes made as a result of this period of reflection and revision included combining codes into single parent codes, adding and deleting codes, and redefining existing codes, based on our growing understanding of the range of experiences of RPC participants. See below in this section for the final coding framework that was developed for the second stage of analysis.

When the majority of first interviews were coded for the first cohort, researchers began to identify broad concepts around which to structure the analysis, and contextual themes. The concepts were conceived partly based on researcher knowledge of the intervention aims and support focus, but primarily on the research data itself (see section 3.4.2). The contextual themes (see section 3.4.3) were developed through a process of raising queries in NVivo to identify commonly occurring themes and their relationship with the concepts in section 3.4.2.

To observe development in participants' conflict and experience over time and develop the narratives in Chapter 4, data was organised in the thematic analysis tables in chronological order, principally based on the point of data collection (interview 1, diary entry, or interview 2). Consideration of contextual themes helped to interpret participants' experience of the interventions, their journeys and outcomes. When considering which individual journeys to highlight in the case studies, participants were chosen

¹⁹ See EIF definitions of RPC interventions at [Face-to-face support interventions for reducing parental conflict](#)

whose experiences either (i) illustrated a typical or desirable RPC journey, or (ii) demonstrated where a particular contextual factor might have an impact on, or present a challenge for, RPC support, and how or whether the support was able to accommodate this.

The conceptual and contextual themes form the basis of this report and were used to structure the various subsections of the report.

This is the final version of the coding framework, developed for cohort 2 following thematic analysis of cohort 1.

Parent node	Child node	Node description
DROP OUT	Drop out	Anything relating to drop outs
COMMUNICATION	Arguments/overt hostility	Specifically related to communication/disagreement frequently leading to arguments. Trouble keeping arguments out of comms generally. Any improvements in this respect.
	Communication breakdown	Relating to both ignoring during/following arguments, and 'cooling off' as a means of resolving arguments. Ignoring/avoiding discussing certain topics in order to avoid conflict. Keeping things bottled up / repressed hostility/resentment. No communication at all - where comms go via a third party. Using alternative methods of communication to avoid f2f interactions. Any improvements in this respect.
	Comms with child(ren)	Communication between children and parents, children witnessing arguments or other negative communication, and emotional/behavioural impact of communication on children
	Communication: expectations and support received	Participants' hopes and expectations for improved communications, session support related specifically to comms. (improvements can be coded under 'Comms leading to arguments/hostility' or 'communication breakdown' as appropriate)
	PHYSICAL HEALTH	Caring responsibilities / family life

Parent node	Child node	Node description
	Relating to access	Attempts to gain or remove access with reasons linked to physical health of parent or child. Physical health (parent or child) impacting capability of looking after child. Physical health key barrier/enabler in access (as opposed to parental view/opinion)
	External support provision	Any non-intervention support provided or hindering recovery from physical health issues.
	Impact on/of sessions	Changes to sessions or family life relating specifically to physical health e.g. appointment changes, flexibility. Impact of session support on physical health.
	Impact on work/finances	Changes to / challenges with work/income as a result of physical health issues
MENTAL HEALTH	Child and mental health	Anything relating to children's mental health, or the impact of parental mental health on children or parental relationship with children. Can include references to low-level issues related to general wellbeing.
	Mental health tools	Any tools or techniques from sessions which have supported in improving parental mental health or relationship
	Parents' mental health	Conflict between parents that has a detrimental impact on one or both parents' mental health. Mental health issues which exacerbate conflict between parents. Can include references to low-level issues related to general wellbeing.
	Specific mental health condition	Recognition or diagnosis of a specific condition, e.g. anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder
	Other diagnosable conditions	Other non-mental health, or mental health-adjacent, conditions in the family and their impact on family life / relationships (e.g. ADHD, neurodiversity, learning difficulties). Not including physical health conditions.
	Drugs and alcohol	Impact of drugs/alcohol abuse on relationships/family/conflict, and vice versa
ACCESS TO CHILDREN	Refusing access	Periods of time where access is refused completely, not just limited.

Parent node	Child node	Node description
	Child maintenance (access)	Disputes over access as a result of disagreement over child-related financial arrangements. Specifically relating to limitations on access due to child maintenance or finances reduced/increased with changing access levels.
	Mediation/court (access)	Anything relating to access disputes going through mediation or court.
	Access restrictions/unreliability	Control or attempted control over specifics of access e.g. where they go, what they do. Issues with flexibility with dates/times between parents. Includes restrictions due to supervision of contact. Includes disputes due to access.
	Impact on child (access)	Impact on child of access disputes / access situation.
FINANCES	Supporting child	Providing financial support for/to child, inc. through child maintenance
	Not supporting child	Not providing financial support for/to child, inc. through child maintenance
	Financial obligations, debt	Any finances or debt that came about during relationship or separation which continues to impact one or both parents / feed into conflict (do not code child maintenance-related conflict here)
	Miscellaneous financial pressures	Miscellaneous financial pressure not directly related to conflict but providing context
EMOTIONAL REGULATION	Self-care	Instances of when the participant has taken steps to take care of their own wellbeing, been kinder to themselves, taken time for themselves (and the flip side: when they have neglected their own needs/wellbeing)
	Self-reflection	Where participant or the other parent has shown self-awareness or self reflection, OR a lack of it
	Mindset/outlook	Mentions of changes in mindset or outlook in relation to their parental/familial conflict, leading to improved wellbeing/behaviour
	Tools, techniques and strategies	Coping mechanisms to cope with a bad situation; Mentions of tools, techniques or strategies respondents are using to help them manage/regulate their emotional response to conflict, particularly those that have been suggested by the intervention

Parent node	Child node	Node description
HOUSEHOLD/FAMILY UNIT	Impact on child	Changing households having an impact on child wellbeing/behaviour
	New relationships	Any new relationships for either household including children from new relationships
	Parent leaving home	One parent moving out of the family house, or both parents moving home(s)
	Family support	Changes to day-to-day support received or provided by extended family / instances where family support has impacted on family life / individuals / conflict
	Clashes between households	Differences within households, e.g. differences in parenting styles/techniques/rules/routines, which result in / exacerbate conflict
SESSION CONTENT	Sessions tools/techniques	Session tools, techniques or strategies employed from sessions which have been beneficial, not directly linked to emotional regulation techniques; include any negatives
	Session topics/learning	Generic mentions of session content/topics covered, not related to specific tools/techniques. e.g. session content related to understanding other parent's point of view, increasing confidence, parenting etc. include any negatives
	Session relevance	Relevance of session content or relationships between those in group sessions; tailoring of session content; including positive relationship dynamics at start of intervention; include any negatives
	Session videos	Anything relating to videos shown during sessions
REFERRAL	Referral route: court/mediation	Any reference to referral route through court/mediation and reasons behind this
	Referral route: social worker/family worker	Any reference to referral route through social worker/family worker and reasons behind this
	Referral route: other	Any reference to alternative referral routes (e.g. self-referral, charities, school) and reasons behind this

Parent node	Child node	Node description
	Referral information	Information provided at point of referral, not information regarding who referred
	Referral feelings/expectations	Expectations or feelings about sessions at point of referral
SESSION PRACTICALITIES	Couples sessions	Practicalities of the sessions between couples, e.g. how they attended or felt about the other parent attending; opportunities to talk/get things out in the open
	Virtual vs F2F	Anything relating to virtual or f2f delivery, including preferences
	Timing/flexibility	Anything relating to the timing of sessions, the course or delivery in context, or flexibility with arrangements of the sessions
	Group vs 121	Anything relating to group or 121 delivery, including preferences. Opportunities to share experiences, express feelings/opinions and be heard.
	Session accessibility	Issues as a result of delivery e.g. technological problems, process issues or changes due to individual circumstances such as physical injury
SESSION LEADER (RPC practitioner)	Manner (general)	Anything relating to the general manner/presentation/personality of the practitioner, but not relating to course delivery (see "in relation to content")
	Delivery of session content	Anything relating to how the leader delivered the course, enabled better engagement/learning, or facilitated communication. Include negative aspects here too.
	Knowledge/experience	Practitioner's knowledge or experience (or lack of) both personally and professionally. Include negative aspects here too.
	Interaction with other professionals	Interaction between practitioner and other professionals involved in the relationship e.g. social services, court
GOODWILL	Understanding of others' point of view	Recognising, appreciating, awareness or desire to better see other parent's perspective. Self-awareness of bias, recognition of potential impact of own point of view.

Parent node	Child node	Node description
	Relationship warmth/hostility	Anything relating to positive feelings towards other parent, or wanting to have positive relationship with other parent (whether intact or separated). This could range from rekindling warm/loving aspects of relationship, to maintaining a friendship/friendly interactions, to the desire for mutual respect. Appreciating/acknowledging positive things about the other parent. Also, the opposite of this: evidence of hostility and little desire or motivation to change this, on either side.
	Involvement in family life / child relationships	Level of parental involvement in family life or child's life. Increasing awareness (or not) from one (or both) parent(s) to take an interest in and become more involved in everyday family life. Disciplining child. Impact on relationships with children, if relating to relationship with other parent, include in "co-parenting"
	Co-parenting including cooperation and support	Cooperation and coordination of parenting styles, or lack of, from either parent. Includes making effort to support other parent/cooperation. Undermining, not sticking to agreed plans. Flexibility/accommodation, or lack of, in making arrangements for childcare
	Emotional impact on children	Child impacted as a direct result of hostility between parents

5. 'What worked' tables

This section collates all the aspects of support that were seen to work. In places, some key barriers to progress are included.

Table 1. What worked for the referral process

What worked for referrals to RPC interventions?
Both parents having an awareness of other parent's participation
Holding separate conversations with each parent at the earliest opportunity during referral
A non-judgmental, flexible approach to referral, adapted as necessary
Referral contact information provided to both parents
Opportunities for parents to ask questions and resolve concerns

Table 2. What worked to improve communication, and the barriers to improved communication

What worked to improve communication?
Sharing experiences (all session types) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioners demonstrating empathy or understanding, e.g. through sharing of personal experiences relevant to the participant • Hearing the experiences, tips and advice of others in a similar situation (group sessions)
Facilitating conversations (couples' sessions) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a safe space in sessions to share and listen • Impartiality of practitioner, allowing both sides to be heard
Session content on ways of communicating: mode, manner and tone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting the impact of arguments on children is powerful and enlightening for many
Tailored sessions (couples' and 121 sessions) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailoring the communication topics where cases require more nuanced support/complexity; not sticking to a prescribed format

What were the barriers to improving communication?
Being unable to have couples' sessions due to a variety of factors including the nature of the conflict, which prevents parents with very hostile relationships from having the chance to communicate with each other in sessions
Lack of engagement from one or both parents
Highly hostile relationships, including those involving serious breaches of trust, historical accusations of domestic abuse, and acrimonious court cases over child access. Often these cases involved mediators for most communication.

Table 3. What worked to improve goodwill, and what the barriers were

What worked to improve goodwill?
Keeping session structure fluid – Participants valued the tailoring of session content where possible, to account for complexity in relationships.
Encouraging intact couples to make time for each other, take an interest in each other – Sometimes parents simply needed an impartial person to tell them this, and it often had immediate positive results.
Help parents to consider the other parent's perspective – Some parents were surprised by what they learnt about the other parent's feelings and motivations.
Teach parents to reflect on their own behaviour and its impact – Some parents started out convinced that they were completely in the right; at the end they were more self-reflective.
What are the barriers to improving goodwill?
Highly hostile relationships involving serious breaches of trust or a history of domestic abuse. ²⁰
Being unable to have couples' sessions due to a variety of factors, including the nature of the conflict (e.g. serious allegations, court proceedings in progress), prevented highly hostile pairs from having the chance to improve relations.
Complicated contextual factors such as access disputes and the involvement of new partners.

²⁰ Mentions of Domestic Abuse (DA) and Domestic Violence (DV) in this research refer to historical incidents before RPC intervention. As part of the screening and referral process, parents who were experiencing DA/DV at the time of referral/participation were ineligible for RPC and should have been triaged out and offered alternative support.

Table 4. What worked to improve parents' emotional wellbeing

What worked to improve parents' emotional wellbeing?
Teaching the importance of self-care – When parents learnt how this could positively affect their children, this encouraged them to make time for themselves and look after their own wellbeing.
Encouraging self-reflection - Learning to recognise and acknowledge their negative emotions, and their impact on those around them, was revelatory for some parents.
Helping parents to take a step back to adjust their mindset and perspective – Parents found it helpful to think about their conflict and family problems in different ways, and some learnt to let go of smaller issues.
Providing practical tools and techniques, including relaxation skills and stress management (e.g. breathing techniques, meditation). These were particularly helpful for parents with high anxiety, or very hostile relations with the other parent.

Table 5. What worked in terms of practitioners' approach to sessions

What worked in terms of practitioners' approach to sessions?
An approachable and engaging manner
Building trust between the practitioner and parents to develop a therapeutic relationship
Practitioners drawing on real-life experiences where appropriate to relate to parents
Practitioner training on the use of technology to deliver sessions
Ensuring parents have access to technology required to deliver sessions, and additional support if they don't
Matching practitioners and participants based on personal characteristics

Table 6. What worked for intervention delivery mode

What worked for mode of delivery for interventions?
Establishing availability at the outset, and being flexible to contextual changes which affect attendance
Accommodating personal preferences, while identifying any risks associated with that mode of delivery
Encouraging engagement from both parents or all group members, whatever the mode; giving everyone space to speak and be heard
Organisation and communication, whether virtual or in person, especially around scheduling of appointments
Staff training on virtual delivery software and a consistent approach

Table 7. What worked for different session types

Group sessions	Individual sessions
Sharing of experience and building rapport with other group members	Building rapport and trust between practitioner and parent over a period of sessions
Communicating with others in similar circumstances, to boost confidence and reduce stress	Focusing on personal contexts and being flexible around content
Accommodating for continued contact with other group members outside of sessions, and post-sessions	Tailoring the session and intervention length to individual circumstances
Allowing people time to build confidence in group sessions helped participants open up	Identifying participant and practitioner demographics and allocating accordingly
Allowing for individual communication with practitioners where participants feel reluctant to share with the wider group	
Ensuring everyone has the chance to speak and listen during sessions	
Ensuring all participants feel safe and well before closing each session	

Table 8. What worked for organisation of intervention sessions

What worked for session organisation?
Giving parents a choice in session times, including outside the normal working day
Session timings and modes that accommodated different circumstances, including work, social and family life were appreciated by parents
Flexible booking of sessions, where appropriate (e.g. more frequent sessions to begin with, and less frequently towards the end of intervention)
Keeping in touch with participants when they missed sessions
Ensuring final sessions were scheduled in advance
Extending some sessions, where this was appropriate
Communicating with both parents regarding session organisation, even if attending together

Table 9. What worked to prevent attrition from RPC interventions

What worked to prevent attrition?
Being flexible to changing personal circumstances throughout all stages of the intervention
Identifying factors which impact accessibility and making reasonable adjustments, where appropriate
Adequate handling of cancellations due to provider issues and rescheduling at the earliest opportunity
For separated parents, knowledge of the other parent's participation in the programme, and involving both parents together where appropriate
Tailoring session content, with an awareness of other interventions parents had been referred to or were involved in
Giving clear referral information to ensure participants were fully informed of the intervention aims

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