

# EIF National Conference 2017

## Putting evidence into action



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## Breakout 4

# How should services reflect what we know about the importance of the inter-parental relationship?



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Jean Gross CBE,  
Trustee

# Early Intervention Foundation



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Professor Gordon  
Harold, Andrew and  
Virginia Rudd Chair

University of Sussex



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# How the Inter-Parental Relationship Affects Children's Mental Health: Moving from Evidence to Implementation

Gordon Harold

Andrew and Virginia Rudd  
Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health



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OF SUSSEX

# The Significance of the Inter-Parental Relationship for Children's Mental Health



# Rigorous Research as a Platform to Effective Practice

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

Child Development, xxxx 2017, Volume 00, Number 0, Pages 1-13

The title for this Special Section is *Developmental Research and Translational Science: Evidence-Based Interventions for At-Risk Youth and Families*, edited by Suniya S. Luthar and Nancy Eisenberg

## How Can Genetically Informed Research Help Inform the Next Generation of Interparental and Parenting Interventions?

Gordon T. Harold  
University of Sussex

Leslie D. Leve  
University of Oregon

Ruth Sellers  
University of Sussex

Developmental Psychology  
1997, Vol. 33, No. 2, 333-350

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0012-1649/97/\$12.00

## Mom and Dad Are At It Again: Adolescent Perceptions of Marital Conflict and Adolescent Psychological Distress

Gordon T. Harold and Frank D. Fincham  
University of Wales, Cardiff

Lori N. Osborne  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Rand D. Conger  
Iowa State University

In these two studies, the authors used children's perceptions of family relationships to examine simultaneously direct and indirect links between marital conflict and child adjustment. With data pertaining to 146 sixth and seventh graders, Study 1 supported direct and indirect effects of perceptions of marital conflict on internalizing behaviors, and indirect effects for externalizing behaviors. In Study 2, data analyzed from 451 families showed indirect effects of marital conflict and parent-to-child hostility, through adolescent perceptions of such behavior, on both current distress and distress 12 months later in 3 of 4 models estimated. Direct and indirect effects were found for boys'

Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 48:12 (2007), pp 1223-1232

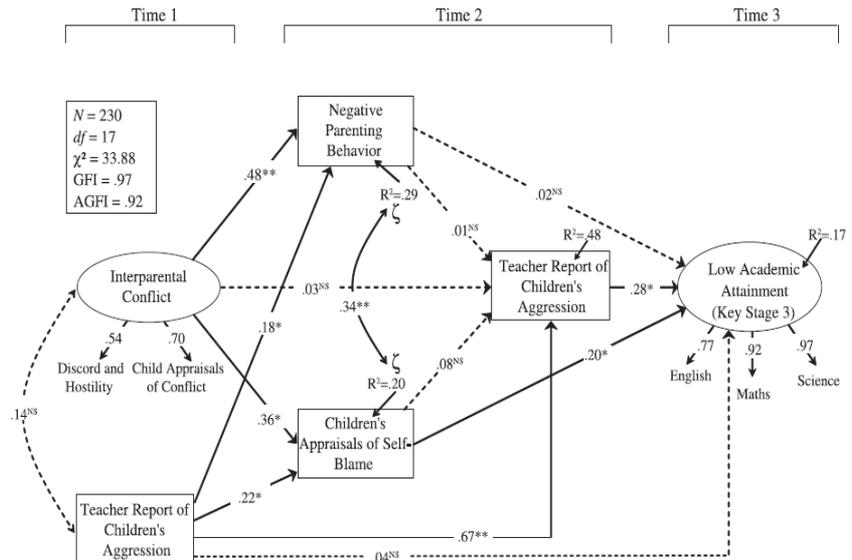
doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2007.01793.x

## Inter-parental conflict and children's academic attainment: a longitudinal analysis

Gordon T. Harold, Jessica J. Aitken, and Katherine H. Shelton

School of Psychology, Cardiff University, UK

**Background:** Previous research suggests a link between inter-parental conflict and children's psychological development. Most studies, however, have tended to focus on two broad indices of



# Importance of working with a Skilled Translational Partner

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) website. The browser's address bar shows the URL [www.eif.org.uk/publication/what-works-to-enhance-inter-parental-relationships-and-improve-outcc](http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/what-works-to-enhance-inter-parental-relationships-and-improve-outcc). The website's navigation menu includes links for HOME, ABOUT, OUR WORK, PUBLICATIONS, RESOURCES & GUIDEBOOK, GET INVOLVED, and NEWS & EVENTS. The main header features the EIF logo and the text "WHAT WORKS TO ENHANCE INTER-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN?". Below this, the page content is divided into three columns. The left column contains the text: "Our assessment of programmes that aim to enhance the inter-parental relationship and improve outcomes for children shows that many of these need more testing". The middle column contains the text: "The Early Intervention Foundation have carried out a review of 'What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children' for the Department for Work and Pensions." followed by details about the review's leadership by Professor Gordon Harold and Dr. Ruth Sellers, and a section for "Key findings include:" with a partial list item starting with "» The quality of the inter-parental relationship, specifically how parents communicate and relate to each other, is increasingly recognised as a primary". The right column features the logos for the University of Sussex and the Department for Work & Pensions, along with a book icon and the title "What Works To Enhance Inter-Parental Relationships and Improve Outcomes for Children?". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 15:34 on 11/06/2016.

What Works To Enhance I... × +

www.eif.org.uk/publication/what-works-to-enhance-inter-parental-relationships-and-improve-outcc

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EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

## WHAT WORKS TO ENHANCE INTER-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN?

Our assessment of programmes that aim to enhance the inter-parental relationship and improve outcomes for children shows that many of these need more testing

The Early Intervention Foundation have carried out a review of 'What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children' for the Department for Work and Pensions.

The review has been led by Professor Gordon Harold, an expert on the role of the family in children's psychological development, and Dr. Ruth Sellers from the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice at the University of Sussex.

Key findings include:

- » The quality of the inter-parental relationship, specifically how parents communicate and relate to each other, is increasingly recognised as a primary

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Department for Work & Pensions

What Works To Enhance Inter-Parental Relationships and Improve Outcomes for Children?

Search the web and Windows

15:34 11/06/2016

# Effective Research Translation and Policy Impacts



## Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families

An evidence resource on family disadvantage  
and its impact on children

April 2017

About the evidence resource

Straight to the evidence resource



For everyone working with children, young people and families

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Home > Analysis

## Parental conflict: the impact for children and how to resolve it

By Gordon Harold | 04 May 2017



Academic whose research underpins new government drive to resolve parental conflict explains how policy can help councils develop support programmes that mitigate the damage it causes to children's wellbeing.



A Department for Work and Pensions policy document, Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families, sets out a series of innovative objectives aimed at helping parents who experience worklessness and other areas of disadvantage to improve outcomes and future life chances for their children. A key focus of the paper is the importance placed on supporting and strengthening the quality of inter-parental relationships, whether parents are living together or not. This emphasis is based on a new generation...



### Jobs

**Children & Young People Now Jobs**

Create an email alert

**Children, Young People and Families Team Leader, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council**

Develop and support the delivery of youth provision and family/community support activities working with providers and partners. £32,486 - £36,379

**Newly Qualified Social Worker, Hertfordshire County Council**

Join our academy and develop your skills for the demands of frontline Child Protection Social Work. Relocation package

# “And There’s More ...” Next Steps

## Work is underway to quantify the cost of children experiencing poor-quality inter-parental relationships (1 of 2)\*

### Background

Recent research demonstrates that children who experience frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict between parents face a greater risk of poor outcomes (Harold et al, 2016). The poorer outcomes associated with poor-quality parental relationships are damaging and costly, not only for the individuals (children and parents) involved but also, indirectly, for the taxpayer as extra support is needed through the provision of dedicated services (for instance, early health interventions, education, social services, early training, long-term welfare costs, crime and justice, family and relationship support services).

Therefore, interventions that improve the quality of relationships between parents offer a significant opportunity to improve outcomes for children and generate economic benefits, such as improved future labour market outcomes for children, and fiscal benefits, such as reduced demand on public spending.

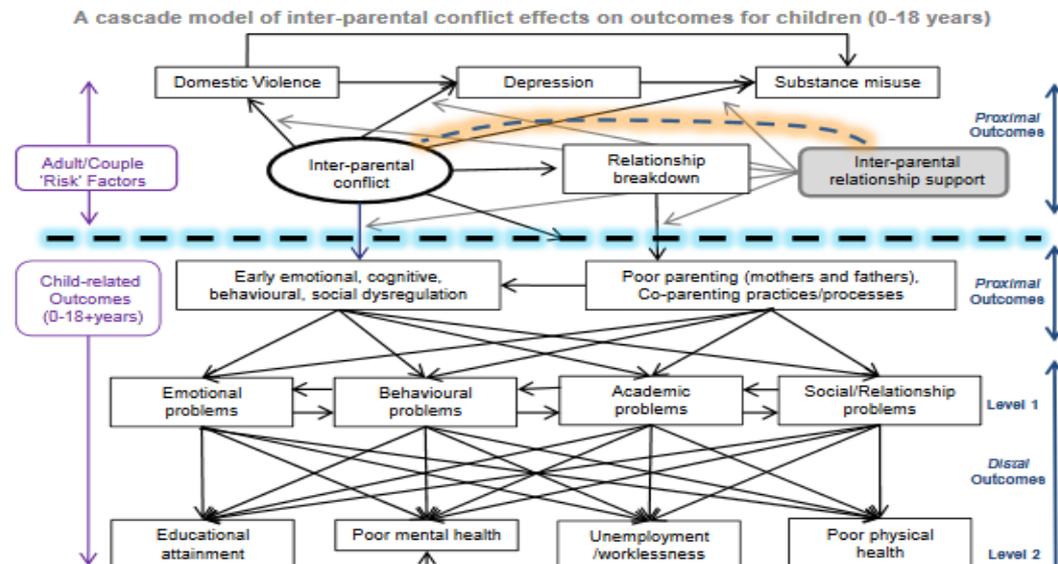
### The cascade model

There is limited evidence on the quantification of costs and benefits that result from improved parental relationship quality.

However, research suggests that the interplay between inter-parental conflict and long-term outcomes for children progresses through multiple *chain-of-event processes (or pathways)* which can be specified through a *developmental cascade model*.

This model shows how the initial experience of parental conflict, if left to develop uninterrupted, accumulates and leads to greater adverse *proximal* (direct) and *distal* (indirect) outcomes as the child gets older.

This model represents a framework through which these effects can be quantified and monetised.



## Key Practitioner Recommendations (CYPN, May, 2017)

- A vital first step to advancing opportunities in this area is to recognise the need for training and capacity building among providers of therapeutic and related support services aimed at vulnerable parents and children. This needs to occur at three levels
  - Front-line practitioners and other professionals would benefit from training in the use of and access to standardised assessment resources that provide opportunities to robustly assess inter-parental/partner relationship quality, enabling them to recognise the potential negative effects of inter-parental conflict - across the *silence to violence* spectrum - on children's outcomes at an early stage.
  - Alignment of specific intervention programmes that relate to different levels and degrees of severity of inter-parental/partner relationship distress is essential if those groups targeted are to truly benefit. This is linked to the importance of accurately measuring "outcomes" linked to the specific focus of each programme.
  - Support and capacity building needs to be prioritised so that providers develop the skills and confidence that allow effective implementation of programmes aimed at vulnerable parents, children and families.
- Commissioning the right early training and capacity building is an essential first step if the needs of parents and children are to be addressed and sustainably delivered.



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Honor Rhodes OBE,  
Director of Strategic  
Development

Tavistock Centre for  
Couple Relationships



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# How can we use the evidence on interparental relationships to inform family services & social work?

- ▶ Should we?
- ▶ Could we?
- ▶ Considering trespass, the private and the personal
- ▶ Considering the workforce
- ▶ Understanding the immensity of resistance
- ▶ Believability
- ▶ The carrot and the stick



Honor Rhodes, OBE

 [@honor\\_rhodes](https://twitter.com/honor_rhodes)





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Dr Sarah Wynick, Head  
of Child and Adolescent  
Psychiatry

The Tavistock and  
Portman NHS  
Foundation Trust



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# Inter-parental relationship focus in CAMHS: barriers to integration

## Parents:

- Shame / 'it's not what we're here for /denial
- Parents locating the problem in the child / avoidance / projections

## Staff:

- Not included in CAMHS trainings or even in the language
- Time consuming and worries about legitimacy?
- Therapists' fear of intrusion /making it worse / sex
- Does parental separation = failure?

## Commissioners:

- why pay for 'adult work'?
- Lack of knowledge of the impact on children's mental health.

# Inter-parental relationship focus in CAMHS: opportunities for integration

- Building on existing good relationships with parents via children, psycho-education, addressing barriers directly
- Influencing staff training and CPD discourse, promoting 'couple thinking', tackling shame and discomfort.
- Influencing commissioners, adult and CAMHS.
- Parents as Partners groups.
- Trainee couple psychotherapists' placements in CAMHS scheme with TR



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Dawn Jones,  
Flying Start Midwife

Luton & Dunstable  
Hospital



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# Dawn Jones

## Flying Start Midwife

Through its training and development route, Flying Start offers skills and knowledge to multi-agency professionals, supporting parents in understanding the impact of the baby or child on their relationships, and to identify the effect of inter-parental conflict on longer term outcomes for a child.

Appropriate support can then be offered.





# OneplusOne

## Me, You and Baby Too

### Perinatal Professionals Training

- Understanding the importance of the couples relationship
- Recognising relationship distress
- Confidence in delivering training surrounding relationship issues
- Dealing with issues such as:
  - Sleep deprivation
  - Lack of intimacy
  - Responsibilities and expectation



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