

Locally commissioned services may be funded by:

- Wellbeing/Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (commissioned by clinical commissioning groups);
- Local authorities through children's centres, early help services, Troubled Families services, youth services and social care budgets;
- Individual or clusters of schools providing wellbeing support.

Parenting programmes

Programmes which focus on improving the parent-child relationship may also include a component of relationship support. These programmes may not have an explicit focus on relationship support, but touch on relationship issues through emphasising consistency of parenting styles, effective communication between partners about parenting, and helping couples better understand their behaviour through thinking about family relationships more generally. Parenting programmes may also explicitly build tackling relationship issues into their programme model and include a specific component that focuses on parental relationships. These programmes aim explicitly to improve the couple relationship as well as the parent-child relationship.

Marriage and relationship education

Marriage and relationship education (MRE) programmes are programmes designed to help couples achieve successful and long-lasting marriages and strong relationships. They typically aim to prevent problems in couple relationships before they occur, and target couples in key transitions such as marriage, parenthood, and separation/divorce.

There are three different types of preventative MRE programmes:

- Diagnostic inventory-based approaches: typically include a questionnaire or inventory used to identify and then discuss any issues that affect the quality of the relationship.
- Information and awareness approaches: typically involve structured sessions engaging in a general discussion of common marital problems and situations.
- Skills-based approaches: aim to equip couples with specific skills that can help to sustain and improve their relationship.

Specialist provision

Some relationship support services aim to address specific issues or target groups. This can include relationship support services designed to help ethnic minority groups, LGBT couples, parents with a disabled child, victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse, parents of adopted parents, single parents, and parents in prison.

Child and family-focused services

Services that focus on supporting children and/or their wider families may also attempt to support couple relationships.

There are a variety of ways in which this occur, including:

- **Early years and early help:** can identify where conflict between parents is affecting families, help parents to understand the cause and impact of conflict through family support work, offer advice and light-touch interventions, and refer families to specialist support.
- **Troubled Families teams:** work routinely with families experiencing poverty and financial stress at high risk of parental conflict. They can provide hands on support to model positive behaviours and strategies, identify early signs of conflict and abuse and refer to evidence-based interventions.
- **Social care:** social workers in adults and children's services work with some of the most vulnerable families that may be at higher risk of relationship conflict.
- Services that focus on how children and family functioning are affected in the context of **divorce and separation.**
- **Contact centres** which facilitate contact between children and non-resident family members through providing a neutral and safe environment for families to meet.
- **Schools** offer direct support on relationships through sex and relationships education, and can play an important role in identifying families where there is high parental conflict that is impacting on children. School counselling and school nursing can support children experiencing destructive parental conflict and help prevent them developing their own relationship difficulties later in life.

Healthcare professionals

Healthcare professionals, including GPs, health visitors, perinatal services and mental health teams, can help to spot signs of parental conflict and relationship distress, provide advice on relationship issues and refer people to more intensive relationship support services. Healthcare practitioners have access to families at key transition points, when there is higher risk of conflict, such as becoming pregnant, having a baby, separation and divorce, losing a job or falling ill. Relationship difficulties are often seen as a private matter, and couples tend to only seek help when they are in crisis. However healthcare professionals are often in a unique position to spot signals of parental conflict early, before problems escalate:

- **Primary care teams**, such as GPs and practice nurses, may be the first service parents struggling with relationship conflict turn to. They can identify where conflict is affecting parents' health and wellbeing, provide information and advice, offer social prescription or refer to specialist services.
- **Midwifery** services routinely screen for risks to identify where conflict is negatively affecting the relationship between parents. They can offer advice on how having a baby impacts on parental relationships, and run parenting programmes which take account of parental conflict.
- **Health visitors** build trusted relationships with parents, and their work allows them to explore more sensitive, personal issues. They can identify early signs of relationship distress and provide brief interventions to help parents understand how to reduce or avoid conflict.
- **Mental health practitioners**, including nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists, have a particularly important role in identifying where parental conflict is a cause of emotional distress, taking account of this in treatment, and making use of specialist relationship support services.

Multi-agency systems

Multi-agency systems try to address multiple outcomes through integrating different services. These can deliver relationship support alongside the provision of other services addressing issues of health, schools, housing, employment, and housing. This includes family hubs and children's centres, as well as Troubled Families teams and specialist multi-agency.

Mediation and legal support

Mediation aims to help separating couples resolve disputes without the need to go to court. It involves a third-party mediator which helps partners come to an agreement.

Mediation can take two forms:

- Support for separating parents to reach agreement on issues related to parenting and finances;
- Family mediation to resolve family conflict, primarily used to prevent the breakdown in parent-child relationships that might precipitate care proceedings.

Families on low incomes can access legal aid for mediation. There are also some examples of mediation being funded by local authorities through the Troubled Families programme and several national pilots.

Family mediation designed to resolve family conflict may be funded by youth services or as part of an 'edge of care' service.

If separating couples go to court, legal support can help prevent relationship problems in the following ways:

- In-court conciliation: dispute resolution used in the early stages of family law proceedings to prevent further legal action.
- Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (Cafcass): can intervene to prevent and safeguard the welfare of the child in family courts.

Generic advice services

There are a number of services that are designed to be accessed in a less intensive format than face-to-face relationship support services. These include:

- Live chat counselling: brief sessions in which users can talk online with a counsellor or trained practitioner. These services can be specifically focused on relationship issues or address relationship issues in the context of other problems.
- Helplines: advice on a variety of different issues over the phone.
- Online tools and materials: forums, tools and written advice that provide guidance on relationship issues.
- Print and visual media: books, magazines, leaflets, DVDs that address relationship issues.

Practitioner training and education

Alongside relationship support services that directly target couples and families, there are many services that aim to train practitioners to effectively address relationship issues in their work.

These can be split into two kinds of services:

- In-work training: online or face-to-face courses designed to equip practitioners who regularly encounter families and/or couples (e.g. health visitors and GPs) with the skills to effectively address relationship issues.
- Formal education programmes: diplomas, bachelors, masters, and doctoral programmes designed to train people to become practitioners of relationship counselling and/or other forms of relationship support.

Wider services

There are also wider services that can help spot relationship difficulties in their contact with families and refer to specialist services, such as police, housing and benefits services, and the wider voluntary sector. Many of these services come into contact with families in poverty or under economic pressure who have higher risks of parental conflict.