



Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool

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

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

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

In this document you will find:

- A brief overview of the evidence on parental conflict, and link to further information.
- An introduction to using a systemic approach to reduce the impact of parental conflict on children.
- Descriptors for eight key elements which make up a reducing parental conflict system.
- A list of questions to use to monitor practical changes in your local area.

An overview of the evidence

1. Conflict between parents is a normal part of relationships. However, there is a large body of evidence that shows that parental conflict which is frequent, intense and poorly resolved puts children's mental health and long-term outcomes at risk.
2. Parental conflict can be reflected in a wide range of behaviours, from constructive (helpful) to destructive (harmful) behaviours. Harmful behaviours in a relationship which are frequent, intense and poorly resolved can lead to a lack of respect and a lack of resolution. Behaviours such as shouting, becoming withdrawn or slamming doors can be viewed as destructive.
3. Parental relationship distress is different from domestic abuse. This is because there is not an imbalance of power, neither parent seeks to control the other, and neither parent is fearful of the other.
4. Parental conflict can harm children's outcomes regardless of whether parents are together or separated, are in a same-sex or heterosexual relationship, or are biologically related to the child or not, such as in blended or foster families.

5. Children in workless families are twice as likely to experience damaging parental conflict as those where both parents are working. Financial difficulties impact on parental mental health, which can increase parental conflict. This in turn can impact on parenting and children's outcomes.
6. Interventions which focus solely on supporting the parent–child relationship (such as parenting programmes) in the context of parental conflict are unlikely to improve outcomes for children.
7. Evidence suggests that parental conflict may have more of a negative impact on the father–child relationship than the mother–child relationship. Fathers are more likely to respond to parental conflict by withdrawing from their children or adopting poor parenting practices. In addition, parental separation can lead to reduced and inconsistent contacts between children and non-resident parents, who are typically fathers, further disrupting the father–child relationship. For these reasons, including fathers in family-focused interventions is an important future direction for both practice and research.

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

A systemic approach

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

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

Using the planning tool

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

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

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

DIMENSIONS	KEY ELEMENTS	PROGRESS LEVELS				
PLAN	1. Strategy	<p data-bbox="792 464 882 549">0</p> <p data-bbox="786 632 891 703">ENTRY LEVEL</p> <p data-bbox="725 810 954 951">Services yet to prioritise parental conflict but provide strong foundations</p>	<p data-bbox="1084 464 1173 549">1</p> <p data-bbox="1077 632 1182 703">FIRST STEPS</p> <p data-bbox="1001 810 1256 951">Principle of tackling parental conflict is accepted and there is commitment to action</p>	<p data-bbox="1375 464 1464 549">2</p> <p data-bbox="1337 632 1509 703">EARLY PROGRESS</p> <p data-bbox="1312 810 1532 911">Initial development to tackle parental conflict</p>	<p data-bbox="1666 464 1756 549">3</p> <p data-bbox="1599 632 1823 703">SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS</p> <p data-bbox="1588 810 1839 911">Initial results achieved and positive outcomes evident</p>	<p data-bbox="1957 464 2047 549">4</p> <p data-bbox="1935 632 2069 663">MATURE</p> <p data-bbox="1890 810 2114 951">Embedded good practice and others learning from achievements</p>
	2. Workforce					
LEAD	3. Partnership					
	4. Community					
DELIVER	5. Services & interventions					
	6. Coordinated working					
EVALUATE	7. Outcomes & experience					
	8. Evaluation					

Common typologies

Most local areas in England started on a journey to reduce the negative impact of parent conflict a few years ago and different local areas have encountered different obstacles along the way. Therefore, local areas are likely to be at different points in their journeys now. However, there are some common typologies for areas using the tool.

0 Type 0: Starting off

- No infrastructure specific to parental conflict yet.
- Early discussions among stakeholders.
- All or most of the Planning Tool key elements are scored as 0 Entry Level.

FOCUS ON:

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

1 Type 1: Becoming established

- Some key champions and infrastructure specific to parental conflict and this work has a growing local profile.
- Planning Tool key elements usually scored as between 1 First Steps and 2 Early Progress.
- Building investment in workforce training and evidence based interventions

FOCUS ON:

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

2 Type 2: Making good progress

- Well-established and high-profile approach to reducing parental conflict, embedded within wider child and family services.
- Planning Tool key elements usually scored as between 2 Early Progress and 3 Substantial Progress.
- Starting to share learning with wider audiences.

FOCUS ON:

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

Gauging your progress

There are practical local changes that can be monitored to track your progress level. When completing an assessment using the tool, you will be asked to answer the following questions.

1. What proportion of the following workforces have received reducing parental conflict (RPC) training?

	0–25%	25–50%	50–75%	75–100%
Early help				
Commissioned early help services				
Children's social care				
0–19 health services				
Others				

2. Of those who have been trained, how many are using this learning when engaging with families?

None	Some	Most	All	Don't know

3. Do you have any activity which supports the embedding of RPC practice and support for parents such as practice sharing events or networks, newsletters or champion/ambassador roles?

Yes		No	
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4. Do you have an active team of RPC trainers in your local area?

Yes		No	
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5. Do you collect data on parental conflict – for example, is parental conflict captured in your case management system(s)?

Yes		No	
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6. Is parental conflict included within the following strategic documents?

	Yes	No
Early help strategy		
Children and young people plans		
Others		

7. How aware of the RPC agenda are local senior leaders and partner organisations?

	Not aware	Somewhat aware	Very aware
Senior leaders			
Partner organisations			

8. Does your local area provide an online offer – such as links to RPC information on your children's services webpages, posters, information leaflets or videos?

Yes		No	
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9. Do you have an intervention or programme that specifically addresses the parental relationship as part of your offer to parents?

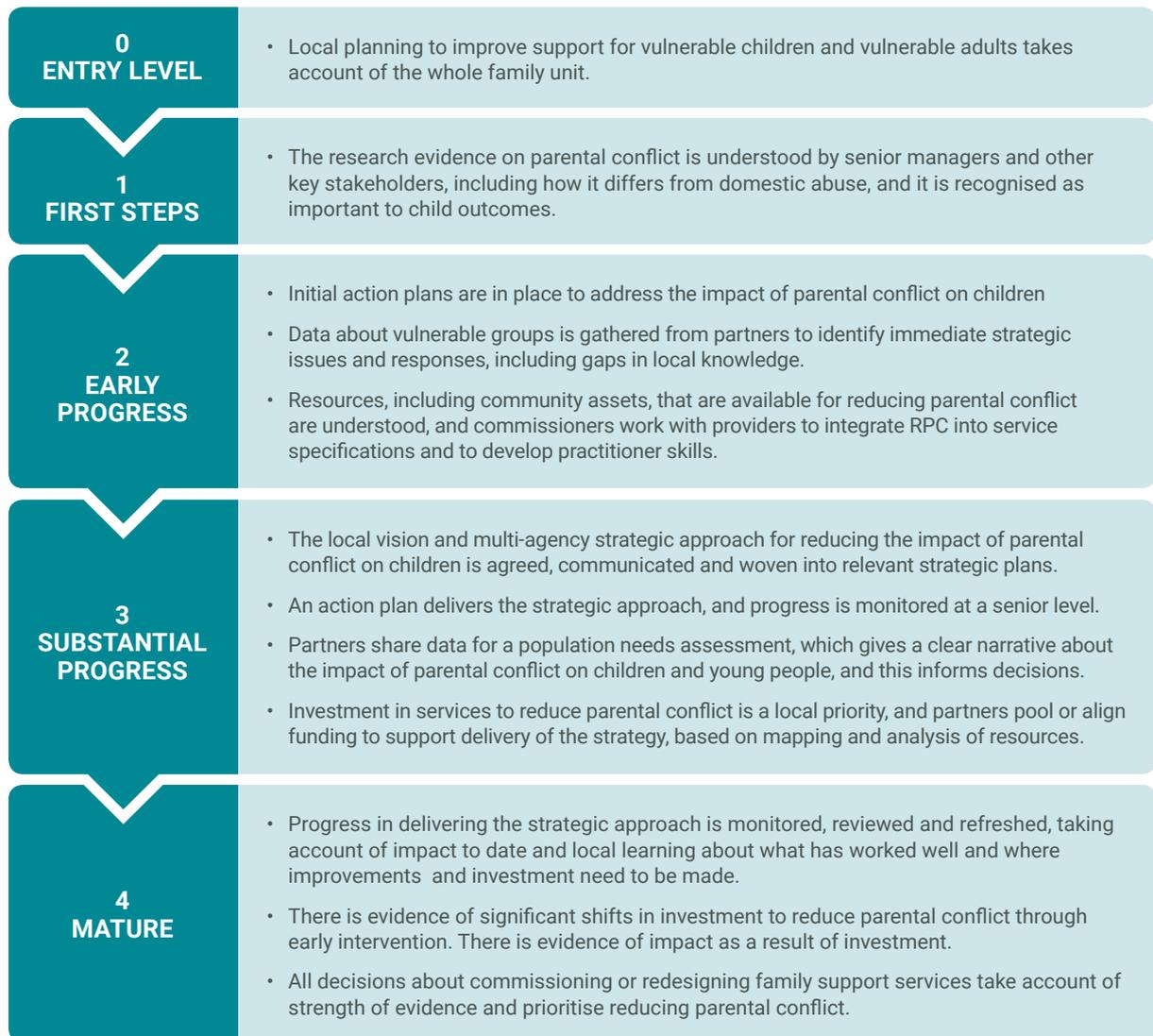
Yes, for intact couples	Yes, for separated couples	Yes, for both	No

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PLAN

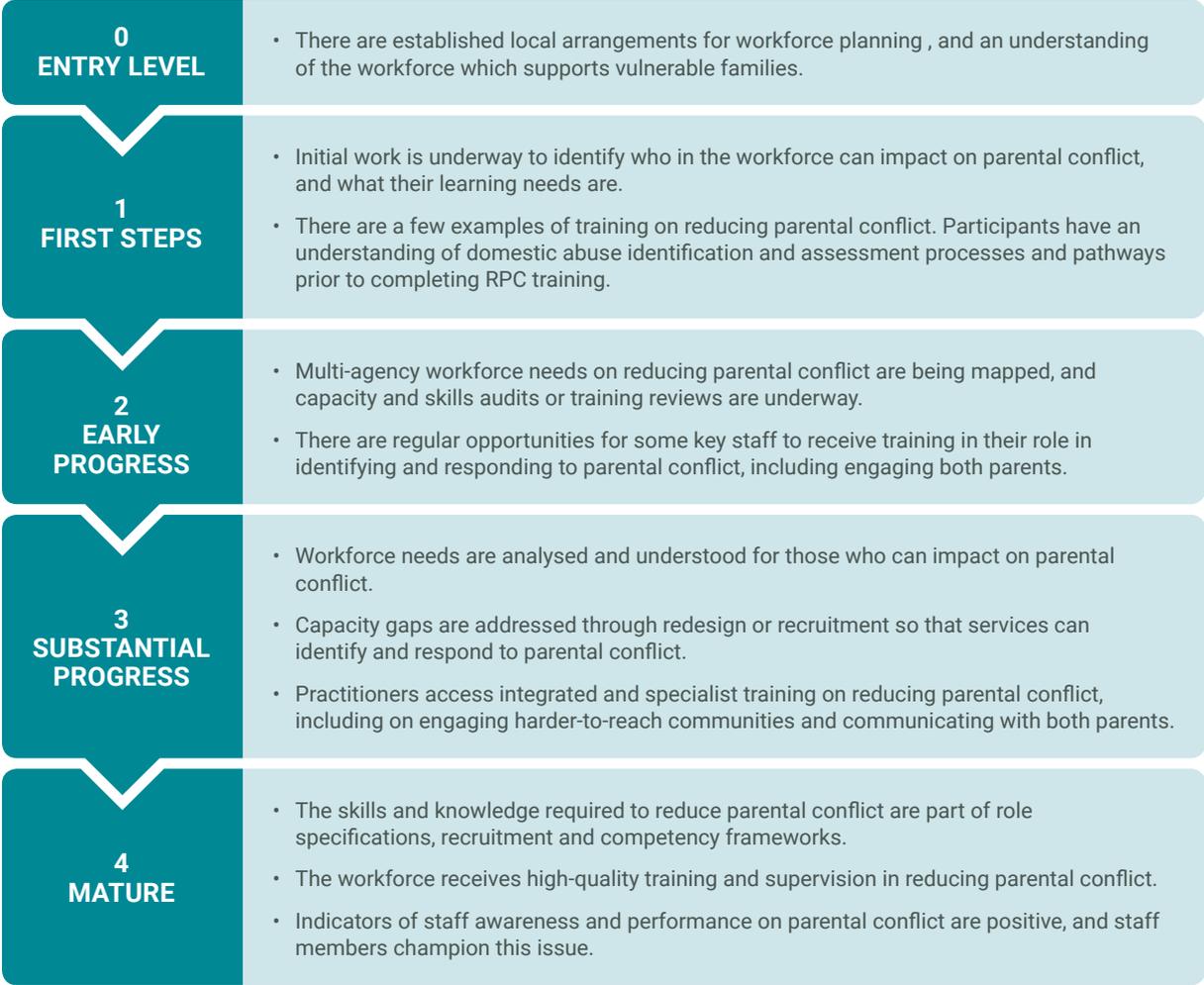
1. STRATEGY

This element focuses on the local vision, strategic approach and plan for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. It considers how well community needs are understood, how data is used, and what the shared priorities are for taking action. It also considers how resources are aligned between partner organisations to support delivery of the local strategy. The strategic approach can be set out in an RPC-specific written strategy or integrated within wider early intervention family strategies.



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PLAN	2. WORKFORCE
	This element focuses on local arrangements for ensuring that the multi-agency workforce has the right skills and confidence to deliver the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. This includes analysing workforce needs across the system, and delivering capacity and capability through redesign, recruitment and training.



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3. PARTNERSHIP

LEAD

This element focuses on strategic leadership and partnership working to drive forward delivery of the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children. It focuses on core children's services partners as well as adult mental health services, domestic abuse services, homelessness services, alcohol and substance abuse services, and probation and prison services. This element also includes how leadership is distributed across the community and local organisations.

0 ENTRY LEVEL

- There are established partnership arrangements for making decisions about strategic priorities for local family services.

1 FIRST STEPS

- There is low but increasing awareness of the importance of addressing parental conflict, championed by some partners.
- A senior leader is accountable for driving the strategic partnership approach to reducing parental conflict.

2 EARLY PROGRESS

- An identified partnership group has lead responsibility for reducing parental conflict and its impact on children. This brings together a growing group of partner agencies and there is willingness to deliver actions, share funding and responsibility, and design solutions. Partners are contributing to the development of the local strategy and action plan.
- Partners review the latest evidence on parental relationships and child development, and use this to consider local approaches to reducing the impact of conflict.

3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

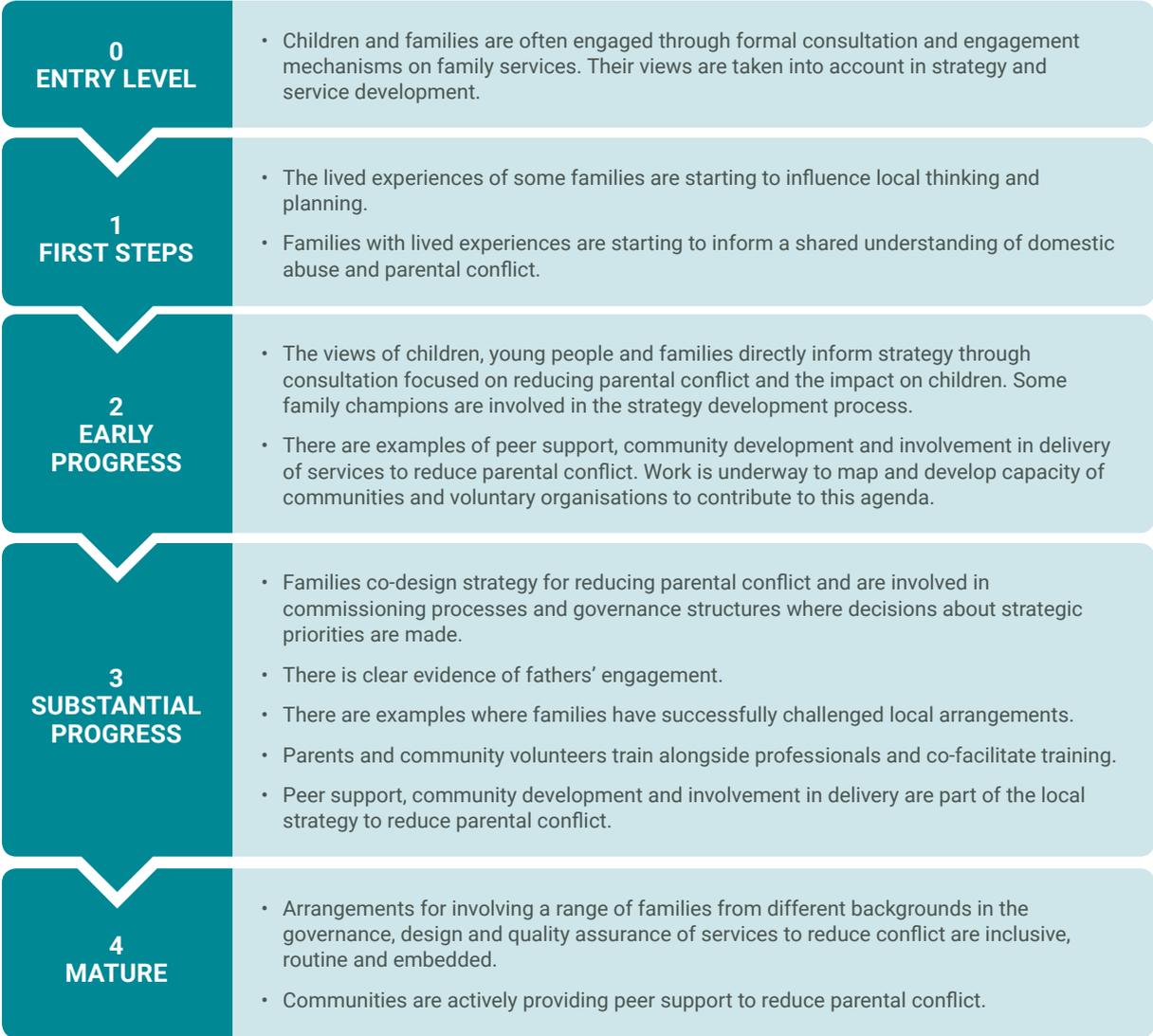
- The strategic partnership group is broad, active and having an impact. Partners actively support and challenge each other.
- Governance of delivery of the strategy is clear and partners have a shared understanding of goals, performance and their role in taking action. There is an agreed process for addressing areas of underperformance.
- Operational and strategic leaders champion the importance of investment in services to reduce parental conflict and the benefits of a more joined-up approach.
- Local leaders encourage innovation and collaboration in how services are planned and delivered, alongside a focus on using evidence.

4 MATURE

- An influential and effective partnership group actively owns the strategy and is accountable for the delivery of action plans for reducing parental conflict. Timely delivery of actions is routine, and there is a breadth of impact.
- Senior leaders are advocates and champions for the delivery of the local strategy for reducing parental conflict.
- Local leaders and decision-makers routinely draw on reliable evidence to inform resource use and service design, and challenge policy with a weak evidence base.

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LEAD	4. COMMUNITY
	This element focuses on how families and the local community are engaged in the design and delivery of the local strategy for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children.



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DELIVER

5. SERVICES & INTERVENTIONS

This element focuses on how, at an operational level, local services deliver support to reduce parental conflict, including evidence-based programmes, and the way that information about parental conflict is made available to families.

0 ENTRY LEVEL

- Services to support vulnerable children and adults take account of the whole family unit.

1 FIRST STEPS

- Front-line working on parental conflict is starting to be seen in some areas. There is variable understanding within local family support services of the role they can play in reducing parental conflict.
- Parents are signposted to online self-help resources and interventions.

2 EARLY PROGRESS

- Key services recognise their role in reducing parental conflict. Support to reduce parental conflict is targeted at priority groups.
- Some evidence-based interventions or programmes are being implemented, although funding for these may be short-term or insecure.
- Some services collaborate on information for families about the impact of parental conflict, including the differences between parental conflict and domestic abuse, and how to access support.

3 SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

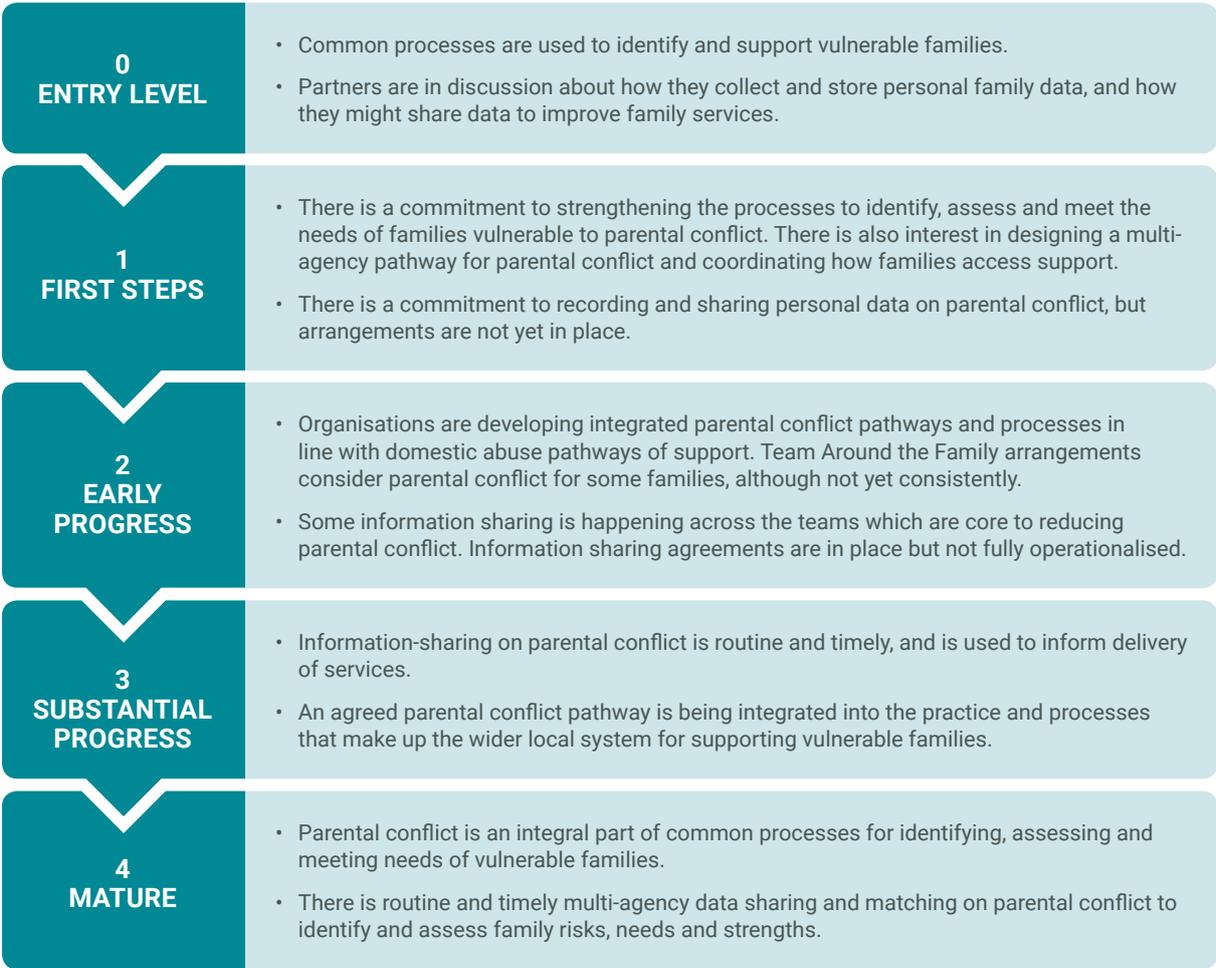
- Data shows that the quality of services to reduce parental conflict is good and improving.
- Approaches to working with families prioritise relationships and this influences how services are designed and delivered.
- Evidence-based programmes to reduce parental conflict are embedded in key services. These interventions are targeted accurately and evaluated for impact.
- There is a clear understanding of the different support for parental conflict and domestic abuse across the local workforce and this is communicated to families.
- Information about parental relationships and support services is accessible to and understood by all families. Services work together to reach families that are identified as priority groups with the information that they need.

4 MATURE

- Data shows that the quality of services to reduce parental conflict is good or excellent.
- Service and case audits consider the effectiveness of the local system for families that are vulnerable to interparental conflict, and findings are used to inform service redesign.
- There is a coherent portfolio of evidence-based interventions which are embedded in the local family offer. Interventions are evaluated and achieving good outcomes for children.
- Families across all communities consistently report that they have access to up-to-date and accurate service information in a range of ways, with appropriate support to do so where this is needed.

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DELIVER	6. COORDINATED WORKING
	This element focuses on how local services collaborate using common systems and processes to identify, assess and support vulnerable families, and on the arrangements for collecting and sharing personal data to support care planning.

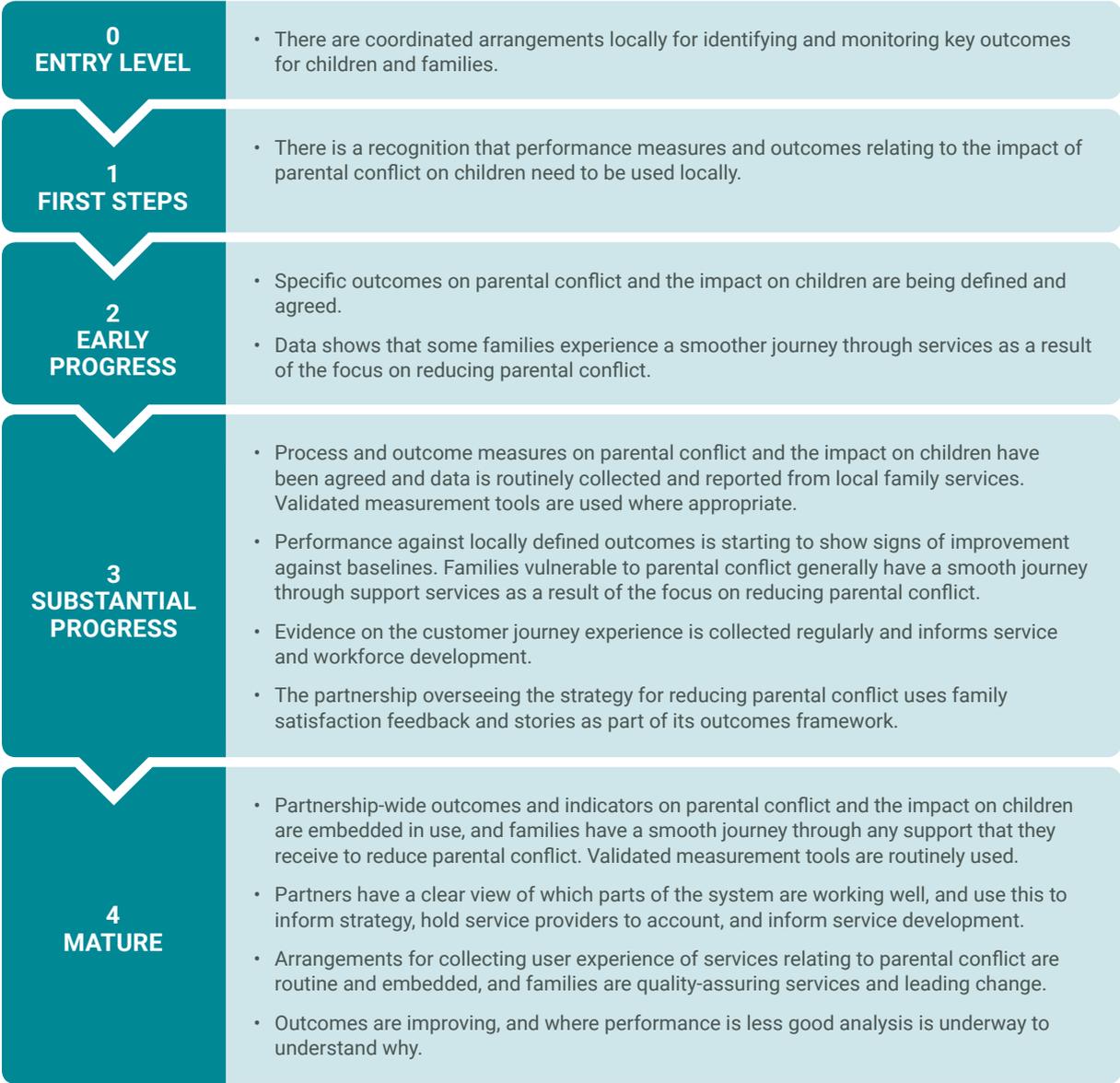


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EVALUATE

7. OUTCOMES & EXPERIENCE

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



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EVALUATE

8. EVALUATION

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

