

Recognising the difference between parental conflict and domestic abuse



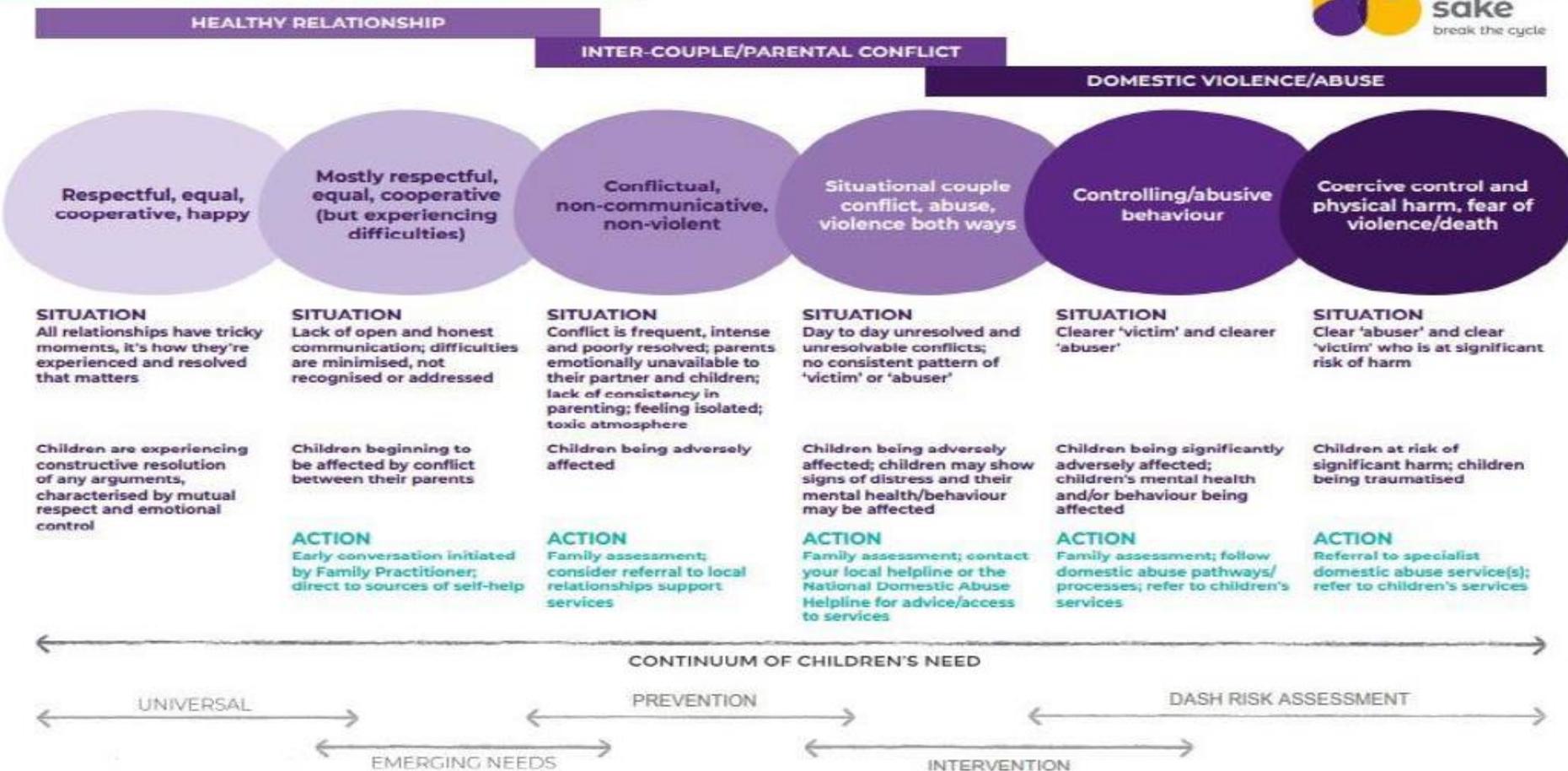
What is this person talking about?

“The worst thing you can do is poke it, throw things at it in an attempt to tackle it yourself. No matter big or small it is getting, involving yourself can put yourself in serious danger and well as cause harm to them. The best thing you can do is step away carefully and leave it to the professionals”

What are we worried about as practitioners when working with couples?

- You may not personally feel apprehensive about encouraging adults to talk about their relationship difficulties. In fact you might be totally brilliant!
- However, you may have experience of others around you sharing their worries about this challenging aspect of our work. These are genuine concerns that practitioners can have. This sometimes prevents workaround parental conflict and relationship difficulties taking place for fear of 'opening a can of worms' or 'poking the wasp nest and getting stung'
- Please share your thoughts in the chat
- There are no wrong answers here we are trying to encourage open and honest dialogue so that we can discuss the barriers.

Parental Relationships Spectrum*



*Adapted by The For Baby's Sake Trust from the model developed by Dr Mark Farrall, Ignition Creative Learning Limited. www.Forbabysake.org.uk

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What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer.

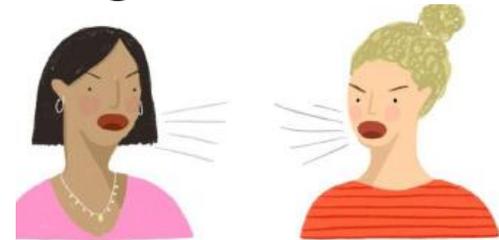
Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
2. Psychological and/or emotional abuse
3. Physical or sexual abuse
4. Financial or economic abuse
5. Harassment and stalking
6. Online or digital abuse

What is parental conflict?

Disagreements in relationships are totally normal and not necessarily problematic when resolved constructively. However, when parents are entrenched in conflict that is frequent, intense and poorly resolved it is likely to have a negative impact on the parents and their children.

This impact is serious and can have lifelong implications for children just in the same way that domestic abuse can too. Constructive or destructive conflict is about disagreeing. How and if you can work out a way to find resolution is what shapes the health of a relationship. It's normal in a healthy relationship to argue.



What is parental conflict? Continued...

The difference between arguing in a healthy relationship versus unhealthy is that the argument tends to be focussed on finding resolution not on winning. In an unhealthy relationship arguing is personal, never gets to a solution and becomes about winning at all costs.

Constructive conflict often involves an apology when things escalate away from resolution as at the heart of the conversation is the desire to find a solution. Relationship damaging conflict does not have this focus on a solution. It is damage on top of damage. There is only rupture and no repair. This kind of communication between a couple is not positive role modelling for a child to be exposed to.



Constructive versus destructive conflict - family communication rules

*Conflict in relationships
is a reality*



CONSTRUCTIVE
(is helpful)

- ACKNOWLEDGING
- CALM
- FOCUS ON TOPIC
- NO BLAMING
- FIND A SOLUTION
- SHOW RESPECT



DESTRUCTIVE
(is unhelpful)

OR

- SHOUTING/ SWEARING
- TRYING TO WIN
- MAKE PERSONAL COMMENTS
- DON'T LISTEN
- NO RESOLUTION
- LACK FOCUS

Constructive and Destructive - Goeke-Morey, Cummings, Harold and Shelton (2003)

What is happening here? Consider how each person feels? What is happening for the young boy? Is this domestic abuse or is this parental conflict? Discuss why in chat

<https://youtu.be/HO1br1ptkhU>

(follow the link)

What does coercive control look like?

How is it experienced by victims/survivors:

- Captive
- Confused
- Scared
- Freedom

These are not common aspects of stress related relationship conflict... Lets

talk about indicators of coercive control.

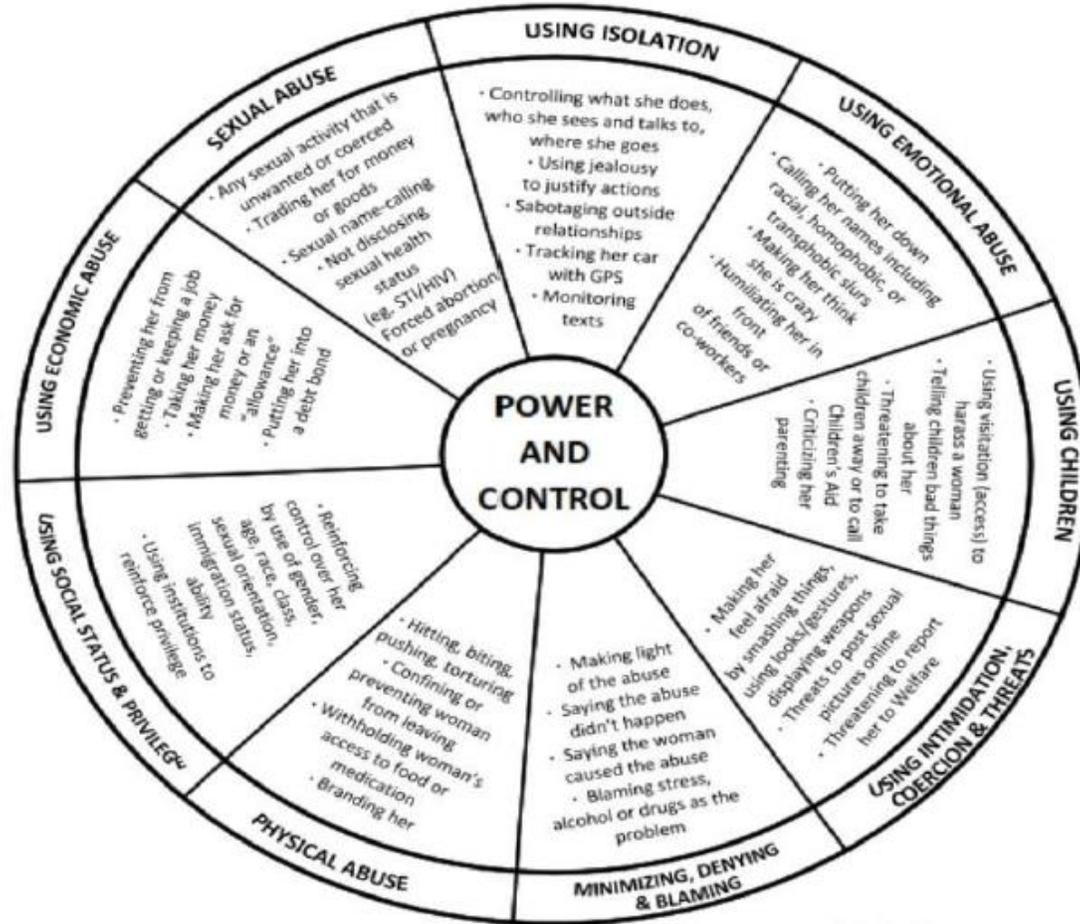
Don't disappear

'Don't Disappear' tells the story of Jamie and Emma, from the seemingly loving early stages of their relationship, to the development of coercive and controlling behaviours such as jealousy and possessiveness, control, love bombing and isolation. Credit Victims First.

<https://youtu.be/d6rt8w5HBWw>

(follow the link)

Wheel of power and control



What does a mutually respectful relationship look like? What language do we use? How does it feel? How it is experienced?

Independence, respect, communication, loyalty, equality, moving at a comfortable pace, inclusive, trust, compassion, supportive

What else?

How does it feel?

Cared for, loved, can able to make decisions together, taking turns, gets along with friends and family, shares the chores and the childcare, supports education and work, takes turns, looking forward to things together, making plans together

What does an unhealthy and potentially abuse relationship feel like? What language might be used?

Intensity, putdowns, humiliation, anger, disrespect, guilt, control, obsession, isolation, jealousy, manipulation, sabotage

What else?

How does it feel?

Like walking on eggshells, scared what the day might bring, how they will behave towards friends and family, not being able to make decisions, not getting a say, trying to keep the peace, planning my life around their needs and how to not cause problems. They withdraw from family time or family engagements, try to excuse their partners behaviour, sudden changes in behaviour or appearance, unexplained marks or bruises that are excused as something else, becoming concerned or anxious if they are not responding to messages immediately from their partner, expressing fear about the way their partner might react in a given situation.

What can we do? What are the questions we need to ask?

- How have you had to change your behaviour because of what might happen between you?
- When you say 'argument' what do you mean by that – tell me about the last one?
- When you have an argument or 'argue back' would there be a consequence?
- What normally happens when you have an argument – talk me through the last one
- How do your arguments get resolved?
- How do you both feel after an argument?
- Who chooses your everyday activities – where you go, what you eat, what the children can and cannot do etc?
- What do your friends, family and children think about your partner?

Routine relationship curiosity

We need to create a professional environment where we ask – ‘routine enquiry’ we ask about the relationship between not just the couple, but between the couple and their children, the children, boyfriends, girlfriends, step-children, other adults, we become curious about how ‘people get along’. This is positive relational practice. We need to encourage families to talk to each other about relationships. Young people in particular need to know what ‘healthy’ looks like.

If we do see an injury or something that bothers us - we ask
We don't ever ignore an injury, marks, damage to property

Don't assume you know what is going on,
explore both parties thoughts and feelings

Be curious, like an inquisitive toddler!
What is really going on?

Encourage a culture of appreciate
between the people you are supporting.
Kindness wins over blame every time

Remember that not everyone wants to change, all you can
do is offer your support but someone needs to want things
to be different in order to make change happen

It's ok to feel uncomfortable about talking to someone
about their relationship but remember that as long as you
are not dishing out advice and you stick to asking questions
then the outcomes tends to be good

Are there *any* similarities between domestic abuse and parental conflict – what about the ‘grey’ areas?

