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# Acrimony Scale

25-item self-report for separating, separated or divorced parents

The Acrimony Scale, sometimes referred to as the Parental Acrimony (PAC) Scale, is a 25-item questionnaire designed to assess areas of potential conflict in separating, separated or divorced parents. This original version of the measure includes items aimed at assessing relationship conflict, individual adjustment of each partner to separation, concern about child support payments, and concern about current parenting arrangements.

	Internal consistency	Test-retest reliability	Validity	Sensitivity to change
Psychometric features	✓	?	?	✓
	Brevity	Availability	Ease of scoring	Used in the UK
Implementation features	✓	✓	✓	?

\*Please note that our assessment of this measure is based solely on the English version of the measure. The other versions of this measure were not assessed and therefore it should not be assumed that they would receive the same rating.

## What is this document?

This assessment of the Acrimony Scale has been produced by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) as part of guidance on selecting measures relating to parental conflict and its impact on children. For more information on how to select and use a measurement tool, download our short practical guide on using validated tools to measure parental conflict and its impact on children: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/using-validated-tools-to-measure-parental-conflict-and-its-impact-on-children>



**We did not find information on the validity of the Acrimony Scale.**

**Although there is evidence that the Acrimony Scale can detect changes after participation in short mediation and relationship interventions, this information should be read with caution since there is limited evidence to confirm that the outcomes assessed are stable over time.**

## About the measure

 <p><b>Author(s)/ developer(s)</b></p> <p>Emery</p>	 <p><b>Publication year for the original version of the measure</b></p> <p>1982</p>	 <p><b>Type of measure</b></p> <p>Parent self-report</p>
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<b>Outcome(s) assessed</b>	This measure has been designed to assess parental conflict in separated or divorced parents.
<b>Subscales</b>	N/A
<b>Purpose/primary use</b>	This measure was originally developed to address several areas of potential conflict between separated or divorced parents, and can also be used with separating parents with some custody arrangements. Items are worded in a counterbalanced format to control for response bias.
<b>Mode of administration</b>	This measure can be completed in person.
<b>Example item</b>	'Is visitation a problem between you and your former spouse?'
<b>Target population</b>	This measure was originally developed for separated and divorced parents with custody arrangements, and can also be used with separating parents with some custody arrangements.
<b>Response format</b>	Likert scale
<b>Strengths &amp; limitations</b>	<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Acrimony Scale has good internal consistency and is sensitive to change in short interventions.</li> <li>• The Acrimony Scale is free to access and easy to score.</li> </ul> <p>Limitations:</p> <p>Based on our review, we found insufficient evidence to establish that the Acrimony Scale is a valid measure with good test-retest reliability over short periods of time.</p>
<b>Link</b>	N/A
<b>Contact details</b>	N/A
<b>Copyright</b>	Based on our review of the evidence, it appears that the developer did not provide information on copyright. The key reference (included below) should be cited when using the measure.
<b>Key reference(s)</b>	Emery, R. E. (1982). <i>Marital discord and child behavior problems</i> . [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. SUNY at Stony brook.

# Psychometric features in detail

## Internal consistency



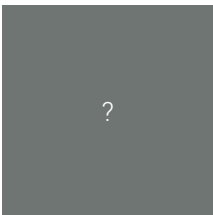
From our review of the evidence, we found several studies reporting internal consistency.

Shaw and Emery (1987) reported that the internal consistency coefficient was 0.83. The study explored the association between parental conflict and children’s behavioural adjustment and was conducted in the US with a sample of 40 separated mothers who were custodial parents for their children. Mothers’ ages ranged between 20 to 45 years, with a mean of 30.7. The length of parental separation varied from two months to six years, with 62.5% of families having separated in the last two years. The majority of study families were white (75%), with the remainder being from minority ethnic groups.

McIntosh et al. (2007) reported an internal consistency coefficient of 0.82 for mothers and 0.86 for fathers. The study compared outcomes for two groups of separated parents who attended two different forms of brief therapeutic mediation in Australia. The sample included 164 mothers and 143 fathers. The average age of mothers was 38.5 years, and 40.5 years for fathers.

Rahimullah et al. (2020) reported that the internal consistency coefficient was 0.81 in sample one and two combined. The study was an impact evaluation of a telephone-based family mediation service in Australia and was conducted with 216 separated men and 208 separated women (sample one), and 214 separated men and 199 separated women (sample two).

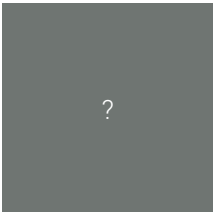
## Test-retest reliability



From our review of the evidence, we did not find sufficient evidence on test-retest reliability.

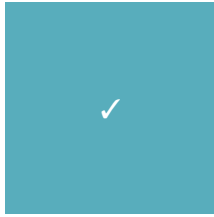
Shaw and Emery (1987) reported that in the unpublished study by Emery in 1982 the test-retest coefficient was 0.88. However, we were not able to access the original study, and Shaw and Emery did not report the time interval used to assess test-retest reliability. For this reason, we do not have sufficient evidence to conclude that the Acrimony Scale is a reliable measure over a short period of time.

## Validity



From our review of the evidence, we did not find information on validity of the Acrimony Scale.

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**Sensitivity to change**

There is evidence that the Acrimony Scale can detect changes after participation in short mediation and relationship interventions (Jacobs and Jaffe, 2010; Stallman and Sanders, 2014).

Jacobs and Jaffe (2010) reported that the Acrimony Scale was sensitive to change between pre-test and a three-month follow-up. The study detected a significant difference ( $t = 5.12, p < .001$ ) in acrimony comparing pre-intervention values (Mean score = 58.95; SD = 7.90) and post-intervention values (Mean score = 53.12; SD = 8.64). This study was a pre-post study conducted in Australia, on the Conjoint Mediation and Therapy (CoMeT) Model, aimed at helping high-conflict separated parents reach and secure agreements in the best interests of their children. This study was conducted with a sample of 23 couples (average age of mothers = 41 years, average age of fathers = 43 years).

Stallman and Sanders (2014) reported that the Acrimony Scale was sensitive to change between pre-test (Mean score = 59.11; SD = 10.85), follow-up (Mean score = 56.59; SD = 11.65) and a 12-month follow-up (Mean score = 56.85; SD = 12.41). The difference detected was statistically significant only comparing pre-test and follow-up scores. This study was a randomised controlled trial (RCT) conducted in Australia to evaluate Family Transitions Triple P (FTTP), aimed at helping parents successfully transition through divorce. This study was conducted with a sample of 205 parents who had separated in the past four years and who had a child aged between 2 and 14 years old.

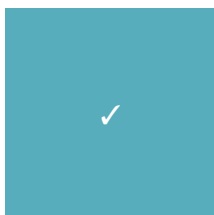
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## Implementation features in detail

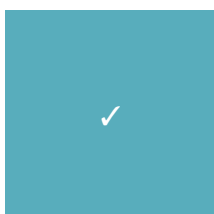
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**Brevity**

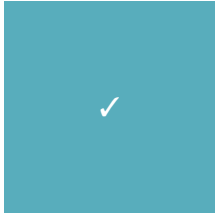
This measure has 25 items.

**Availability**

This measure is free to use and does not require a clinical licence to be used.



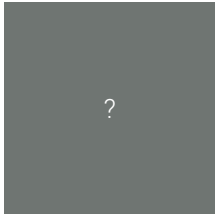
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**Ease of scoring**

The measure has simple scoring instructions involving basic calculations. It does not need to be scored by someone with specific training or qualifications.

The resultant score ranges from 0 to 100, with a lower/higher score indicating more interparental hostility and conflict.

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**Used in the UK**

We have not been able to identify UK impact evaluations in which the Acrimony Scale has been used.

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**Language(s)**

This measure is available in English – as far as we are aware, it has not been translated into other languages.

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## Of potential interest...

If you want to use the measure, you might want to assess the reliability and validity of the Acrimony Scale in your sample to make sure they are adequate.

## References

- Emery, R. E. (1982). *Marital discord and child behavior problems*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. SUNY at Stony brook.
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- McIntosh, J. E., Wells, Y. D., Smyth, B. M., & Long, C. M. (2007). Child-focused and child-inclusive divorce mediation: Comparative outcomes from a prospective study of postseparation adjustment. *Family Court Review, 46*(1), 105–124.
- Rahimullah, R. H., Sanri, C., Halford, W. K., Lohan, A., & Petch, J. F. (2020). Brief Acrimony Scale–8 (BACS-8) for separated parents: Development and validation. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 61*(8), 574–581.
- Shaw, D. S., & Emery, R. E. (1987). Parental conflict and other correlates of the adjustment of school-age children whose parents have separated. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 15*(2), 269–281.
- Stallman, H. M., & Sanders, M. R. (2014). A randomized controlled trial of Family Transitions Triple P: A group-administered parenting program to minimize the adverse effects of parental divorce on children. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 55*(1), 33–48.