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Conducting a needs assessment on parental conflict

A step-by-step guide

March 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Planning to reduce parental conflict

Evidence suggests that parental conflict is a central mechanism through which family stress (such as economic pressure and unemployment) impacts both parenting and children's long-term outcomes. However, there is currently limited local and national data on the levels of parental relationship distress, partly as a result of the difficulty in measuring this precisely. Being unable to quantify local needs has been identified by local areas as a barrier to reducing parental conflict (RPC). Yet, quantifying local area population trends such as the frequency and intensity of parental conflict, and the prevalence of certain populations such as low-income and teenage parents, can open doors to effective commissioning.

This tool is a step-by-step guide on how to assess the population needs in relation to parental conflict in a local area. In this resource you will find:

- what an RPC needs assessment is and why it is important
- a step-by-step guide on how to build an RPC needs assessment
- some case examples
- questions that can guide your data collection process
- data sources that can be used to build an RPC needs assessment.



For more information on the evidence base relating to parental conflict, see:
[What works to enhance interparental relationships and improve outcomes for children](#)

INTRODUCTION

What is an RPC needs assessment?

An RPC needs assessment is a systematic method for reviewing the presence of certain characteristics or conditions in the population that are associated with parental conflict. A needs assessment covers what the population needs are, who has them, and how severe those needs are. It can also cover the prevalence of risk factors that may lead members of the target population to develop future needs, and the utilisation and quality of services available to the population.

Undertaking a needs assessment on parental conflict is a key step to develop a local vision, an effective strategic approach, and a plan for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on children, as identified in the first key element of the [RPC Planning Tool](#). This will help to facilitate more accurate targeting of resources than would otherwise be possible without building a picture of local need.

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A needs assessment can therefore be used:

- to inform key planning documents such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and determine commissioning and workforce strategies
- to inform the theory of change of the local RPC programme and justify the need for the activities as described in the theory of change
- to develop baseline data against which changes over time can be measured, and be included in the local monitoring and evaluation plans to support local decisions on how resources should be used to meet current and future needs
- to identify links with other strategies such as those on early help, domestic abuse and troubled families.

The needs assessment process can be broken down into six main steps:

1



Develop a
demographic profile
of your population

2



Collect data to
assess the local
level of need

3



Check your
data

4



Analyse your data to
identify local needs

5



Use your data to
address identified
needs

6



Reflect on your
data collection
process

INTRODUCTION

Getting ready for your needs assessment

Understand the key outcomes you would like to achieve

Referring to the **RPC Outcomes Framework** and theory of change of the local RPC programme, what outcomes do you want to achieve?



Build a shared interest

Who do you need to bring together from which services to get buy-in?



Establish the right team

Who is competent in handling and analysing data?
Who brings RPC subject matter expertise?

How can you work in partnership with other agencies, local communities and service users?



Incorporate it into your business plan

What advantages are there to manage the needs assessment as a 'project' with a project sponsor, linked to the local Early Help Strategy?

At this point you should consider what teams can help you collect relevant data. You can identify owners for data collection and analysis so that the process is simple to repeat.

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Statutory services such as police, housing services, children’s social work services, Cafcass and health professionals, such as health visitors and school nurses, have significant contact with parents on low incomes experiencing relationship stress, and could play a role in collecting relevant data. For instance, you can collect data from your integrated front door on whether parental conflict is a primary need, or you might include [a couple relationship measurement](#) (such as [the Relationship Quality Index](#)) in your early help assessment. You could also partner with public health services to include an RPC focus across the services that make up the [Healthy Child Programme](#).

Working in partnership with other agencies, communities and, in some instances, service users, will not only help you gather the relevant data. It is also likely to help with planning how to fill the gap between the level of need and current provision, considering you will eventually need to work in partnership with other agencies. To get ready, you can read [A Guide to Co-producing Children’s Services](#) developed by the New Economics Foundation in collaboration with local authorities, and the guide to [Co-production in Social Care](#) published by the Social Care Institute for Excellence.

STEP-BY-STEP



Step 1: Develop a demographic profile of your population

The first step when conducting a needs assessment is to gather demographic data to describe the profile of your population. You can start considering how to define your population area to ensure that it is not too large or too narrow. You might develop a profile for the whole local area, or you might select a smaller area such as a district, ward, or the catchment of a family hub. The profile should include current and future estimates of the usual resident population (including age, gender and geography) and household composition, including marital and civil partnership status and number of children.

Most of the relevant demographic data can be collected using the [local statistics](#) provided by the Office for National Statistics and the [Childhood Local Data on Risks and Needs](#) provided by the Children's Commissioner.

STEP-BY-STEP



Step 2: Collect data to assess the local level of need

The second step when conducting a needs assessment is to gather data to help you understand the level and types of need in your area, and which particular areas these apply to. As outlined in the [RPC Outcomes Framework](#), some risk factors – such as economic stress, family and household factors, and parents' poor mental health – can influence interparental conflict. Understanding the prevalence of these factors is an important step in assessing local parental conflict need.

A list of questions to examine the prevalence of such risk factors is included in this tool [Go](#), while the list below highlights the population groups that may be at greater risk of experiencing such risk factors and parental conflict, for which data could be collected to contribute to understanding local level of parental conflict need.

- **Parents of disabled children and children with special educational needs** are at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health and parental conflict.
- Families already working with early help and specialist safeguarding services are more likely to experience risk factors including housing and financial difficulties and poor mental health.
- **Families living in areas of high deprivation** are more likely to experience risk factors including housing and financial difficulties and poor mental health.
- **Some ethnic minority families** are at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health
- **Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) parents** are at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health.
- **Teenage parents are more likely to experience risk factors** including financial difficulties and poor mental health.

Finally, it is helpful to describe the **prevalence of parents at key transition points** which appear to be associated with a greater likelihood of conflict:

- first-time parents
- parents of children transitioning to school
- separated parents.

Some relevant metrics were published in 2017, when the DWP undertook an analysis on the levels of couple conflict in the UK as part of its 'Improving lives' strategy, and updated the **Parental Conflict Indicator**. Looking at metrics like this is a good starting point to inform commissioning, as it helps to foster a clearer understanding of the likely levels of need in your area. Information at national levels needs to be combined with local data collected from your population.

To get a better understanding of your population needs, we strongly recommend that you engage the voluntary community sector and specific local services (such as early help services) to help collect the data outlined here. If possible, you could collect it directly from families and local communities. Examples of how to do this could include hosting an online survey for families to complete or asking early help services to ask relationship support-based questions during one of their scheduled one-to-one support sessions with families over a two-week period.

It is likely that for some questions it will not be possible to identify specific data sources. In these cases, proxy measures can be used as an alternative to better understand need. For example, some local authorities use the prevalence of domestic abuse alerts, which have no further action as a proxy for the prevalence of parental conflict, or the proportion of children in separated families who see their non-resident parents regularly, which can be used as a proxy for the quality of the relationship between the parents. For more information on what data sources you can use to gather the data you need, see the section in this tool on sources of national and local data on relationship distress and family separation [Go](#).

Other types of data, for example data at the point of referral into children's services, or local Troubled Families outcomes data, might be used with national and local data on population needs to understand the prevalence of parental conflict and relationship distress.

STEP-BY-STEP



Step 3: Check your data

Before starting your analysis, it is important to clean your data. Use the checklist below to help with this process and consider the quality of your data:

- **Timeliness:** does your data represent your local reality from the required point in time?
- **Uniqueness:** have you removed duplicates from your dataset?
- **Validity:** does your data conform to the format, type, range required?
- **Consistency:** is your data comparable?
- **Relevance:** does your data say something about a relevant aspect of your local area?
- **Completeness:** what is the extent of missing data?
- **Representativeness:** to what extent is your data representative of the entire population?

It is likely that some of your data will relate to local authority boundaries, some will relate to regions, some will refer to households, some to adults and some to children or young people. To best analyse your data, it is important that you work on how to make each item of data as comparable as possible. It may be worth calculating the effect per 100,000 population for each item of data so that there is better comparability.

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If you haven't already engaged with a data analyst, this may be the time to consult with someone from the corporate data team, or your local public health team. Data analysts will be able to advise on other techniques to ensure that comparisons between areas and over time can be made.

For instance, you might need to use standardised rates for age, three- and five-year rolling averages, or specific statistical tests to check if the differences observed are real. You might also want to calculate the absolute numbers of people with a particular need (for example, the absolute number of parents diagnosed with mental health issues) to get a better understanding of the number of people who might have a specific need.

Before moving to Step 4, you can conduct a high-level examination to check if the data collected to date resonates with what you would expect: do these top-level findings mirror your sense of the reality or are there some surprises? Reflecting on these questions in a stakeholder group could be a useful exercise to help you understand if further questions are needed to confirm that the quality of your data is high enough to conduct in-depth analyses.

What about qualitative research?

Where there is limited data both locally and nationally and proxy measures are used, qualitative insights from surveys, focus groups and ethnographic approaches can be used to improve your understanding of local needs. Qualitative data can help you confirm that the trends shown by proxy measures are consistent with the needs of your local population. Moreover, qualitative data can also help conduct a high-level examination of your quantitative data as described above.

STEP-BY-STEP



Step 4: Analyse your data to identify local needs

Estimating the current level of parental conflict in your area

Through the analysis of the data collected, you should be able to describe local variations between neighbourhoods, and to identify the needs of each population group.

Working with someone with strong skills in data management and analysis may be beneficial at this point if they are not already engaged in this piece of work. Data analysts can bring an aspect of objectivity which is important when working with people who are close to the subject. They can also help turn the data into visual methods of illustrating key areas for attention.

Depending on what data you have managed to collect, the questions below might help you reflect on the likely level of parental conflict in your area. To analyse your data, you can refer to the [RPC Outcomes Framework](#), which outlines how risk factors can lead to parental conflict and poor outcomes for children.

- **Are risk factors more prevalent in different localities or in the vulnerable subgroups identified in Step 1?**
For instance, you might find out that although the number of parents diagnosed with a mental health condition is relatively low in your local area, most of this subgroup is located within a small geographical area.
- **Is there any other specific group within your local population that appears to have a higher prevalence of risk factors and is therefore particularly vulnerable?**
For instance, you might find out that first-time parents have a higher prevalence of risk factors, including poor mental health and alcohol abuse.
- **Is there any risk factor that is particularly prevalent in your area compared to the national prevalence?**

Understanding the likely future level of parental conflict in your area

An important part of needs assessment is to consider the likely future level of need as a guide to future proofing your integrated response to reducing parental conflict. To estimate how likely needs may reduce, increase or remain the same, you can use population projections data and apply your local rates of risk factors and needs to these projections.

You should consider that these projections take no account of contextual changes. For instance, the impact of Covid-19 is likely to see a rise in the number of families experiencing financial hardship. Given that evidence suggests that financial hardship can affect the mental health and wellbeing of parents, as well as the interparental relationship and coparenting, there might be an increase in families needing RPC support sooner rather than later.

Benchmarking local needs

You might also want to compare your local prevalence with surrounding and comparable areas and the national average. Knowing that some factors are more prevalent in your area than in others, or that comparable areas have very similar needs, might help to reflect on how best to meet the needs of your population, and what you can learn from the experience of other local authorities. To complete this step you can use the data published by DWP in the [Improving Lives:](#)

[Helping Workless Families Local Data Report](#) local data report on the proportion of children in couple-parent families living with at least one parent reporting relationship distress in the nine official regions in England.

Reflecting on local trends

To better understand your local needs, it might be useful to look at historical data to see if there are positive or negative changes in relation to parental conflict (for instance, you might identify a decrease in the prevalence of teenage parents or divorces). Do such trends look and feel right? When comparing current and previous data you need to make sure that the data pertains to the same subgroup or cohort. It will be useful to refer to the national data list in this tool to support this analysis [Go](#).

Please bear in mind that short-term variations (for example, from one year to another) are not sufficient to establish that there is a positive or negative trend. Only a long-term, longitudinal approach (five years or more) can be used to identify potential trends.

STEP-BY-STEP



Step 5: Use your data to address identified needs

Adapting your RPC strategy

The data collected as part of the needs assessment should inform local planning for how parental conflict is going to be tackled, including the commissioning of services that support healthy parental relationships. For instance, some RPC services can be targeted to specific areas, such as rural areas, with a higher level of needs (for example, with a higher level of teenage parents). Certain RPC services might be commissioned to address specific issues (for example, separation) across the whole area. Some questions that might help to reflect on your [RPC Planning Tool](#) and commissioning strategy are:

- How do the vulnerable population groups identified in Step 1 currently access and engage with support services?
- Does your prevalence data identify the need for preventative services tackling the issues that put the most pressure on relationships, such as parental mental health, substance and alcohol abuse?
- Can you identify links with other strategies, such as early help, family substance misuse and alcohol, domestic abuse and Troubled Families strategies? Linked strategies might include a focus on parental conflict and this could pave the way for joint funding opportunities.

Adapting your local workforce strategy

Now that you have used your findings to plan local services and interventions to meet your local need there are other aspects of the system response to consider. You can use your needs assessment to identify training and development needs to ensure your local workforce provide appropriate support. For instance, training might be provided to raise awareness of how first-time parents are likely to experience parental conflict and to show how to open honest discussions with parents. Training could be targeted at a wide range of staff but with a particular focus on staff working with the vulnerable subgroups identified as part of the needs assessment process. To promote community ownership, you could engage service users in the co-production of training, for instance working with a group of RPC champions.

STEP-BY-STEP



Step 6: Reflect on your data collection process

For some local areas, this may be the first time that you approach other teams to share data. Once the needs assessment is completed, you might want to reflect on what data sharing challenges you have encountered and how best to automate the data collection process to agree a schedule for refreshing and sharing data. Identifying challenges and agreeing on a clear strategy will help you to collect new data to monitor progress and identify how your services impact positively on trends. You should also think about clear strategies to share data lawfully, while protecting people's personal information. Some guidance can be found in the [Data Sharing Guidance and Principles](#) of the Troubled Families Programme.

CASE EXAMPLES

Building a picture of need in Northumberland using proxy measures

Northumberland wanted to understand the local level of parental conflict to offer an effective support pathway and improve outcomes for children. Since Northumberland did not have data on the prevalence and impact of parental conflict, they collaborated with local partners to select a series of proxy measures. The role of each proxy was examined with partners and the regional integration led to better understanding of how it might be linked to parental conflict. The selection of proxies was based on explicit assumptions. For instance, Northumberland assumed that child concern notifications where the cases resulted in no further action may indicate parental conflict rather than domestic abuse impacting on the children.

Some of the data collected, such as the number of referrals to domestic abuse services, related to Northumberland's boundaries. Other data such as the percentage of workless families with children in the North East, was not available specifically for Northumberland. Therefore before analysing their data, Northumberland worked with partners to make each item of data as comparable as possible.

Northumberland used their analysis to stimulate local debate, populate the RPC Planning Tool, inform discussions with staff and determine local actions. Northumberland's primary objective is to use such findings to develop a system-wide response to parental conflict and to commission appropriate services and interventions.

This work also highlighted the importance of working with the right partners to collect data on parental conflict. As a next step Northumberland aims to develop new partnerships with midwives and health visitors, who can build trusted relationships with parents, explore more sensitive issues, and identify if conflict is negatively affecting the relationship between parents. Furthermore, more accurate data on parental conflict, will inform their future work in setting priorities and developing commissioning strategies.

Finally, training has been prioritised to ensure that the workforce can identify parental conflict, and to help practitioners develop the confidence, knowledge and skills needed to work with parents to reduce conflict and improve outcomes for children.

Data item selected	Why this may be linked to parental conflict
The number of new private law cases across Tyneside and Northumbria.	Private law cases show the number of applications made following a divorce or separation about the arrangements for children, such as where a child will live or with whom a child will spend time. This is therefore likely to give some indication as to the number of couples separating in Northumberland.
The number of child concern notifications received in a 12-month period – 77% had at least one contact added to the client record seven days prior or after this. Of these cases, 26% resulted in no further action.	Northumberland used this to give some indication of police callouts where the resulting assessment has been undertaken by MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub). Where the case resulted in no further action, this may indicate parental conflict rather than domestic abuse impacting on the children.
The number of referrals to domestic abuse support providers in Northumberland where the client does not recognise themselves as being a victim of domestic abuse.	These cases may be signposted to services other than domestic abuse services; this may be an indication of parental conflict with no imbalance of power. (Although this could also be indicative of a victim not being able or ready to engage with services for domestic abuse.)
The number of children living with alcohol-dependent parent(s) in the North East, and those living with at least one higher-risk drinking parent.	Parent alcohol misuse has been associated with increased interparental conflict, higher frequencies of physical violence, and poor parenting that damages child outcomes. To learn more, see section 2.3 of the RPC Commissioner Guide .
The unemployment rate in comparison with the national average and with the North East as a whole.	For families where there is economic pressure, parents are at an increased risk of emotional distress, including anxiety and depression. This can lead to an increase in interparental conflict and associated negative outcomes for children. To learn more, see section 2.3 of the RPC Commissioner Guide , and the RPC Outcomes Framework .
The percentage of workless families with children in the North East (not available specifically for Northumberland).	
The number of children living in child poverty.	
An estimate of the number of ‘working poor’ families, where they looked at the number of families in receipt of both child tax credit and working tax credit, and those in receipt of child tax credit only.	

CASE EXAMPLES

Targeting high need localities in Dorset and piloting new services

Dorset developed a [dashboard](#) to identify the most vulnerable children and families in the local area, bringing together data from multiple local sources. The dashboard includes key indices such as troubled families, income and employment deprivation, income deprivation affecting children, and living environment deprivation.

The combination of real-time data from a comprehensive set of services enabled Dorset to develop an accurate description of the population needs, and to recognise differences in demographics and risk factors across different areas. For instance, through the analysis of their data Dorset identified Weymouth and Portland as areas where families are experiencing a considerable amount of stressors that put pressure on couple and coparenting relationships. These areas were characterised by:

- high rates of teenage pregnancy, ill health and homelessness
- high rates of children who have additional needs

- high rates of pupils with behavioural and emotional issues
- Weymouth was also found to have the fourth-highest rate of separation in the country (12.05%).

As a result, Weymouth and Portland were selected to run pilot evaluations of a new parental conflict training programme for frontline staff, and of the relationship navigator role which provided advice to teachers and other frontline workers who were supporting families experiencing parental conflict. The relationship navigator role evolved during the course of the project in response to learning. While the role did not initially include any direct work with families, since some of the families that were referred to counselling services didn't follow up, the navigator started meeting parents to discuss their situation and outline possible support available.

Source: Innovation Unit and OnePlusOne. (2019). [Creating a Local Family Offer – Lessons from Local Authority Pioneers](#), pp. 54 and 71.

CASE EXAMPLES

Measuring need in Bristol and adapting the workforce strategy

In 2019, Bristol City Council commissioned a review of their current position in relation to parental conflict, bringing local people and key information together with a view to forming a plan and a set of recommendations. This included an assessment of needs in Bristol, which drew on the following data:

- The population of Bristol was estimated to be 459,300 in 2017, including 85,400 children.
- According to the data from the [Understanding Society longitudinal survey](#), one in four children (21,000 children) had one parent reporting symptoms of emotional distress.
- Around 20,000 people (24%) were living in income-deprived households.
- 975 children (1.2%) were looked after between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, with many having witnessed domestic abuse.
- There were around 5,000 domestic crimes a year in Bristol. More than half of DASH risk assessments concluded there was no likely serious harm from domestic abuse.

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- The Pupil Voice Survey of school pupils of all ages reported that 18% of those in year 8 and 10 responded positively when asked whether there had been ‘any shouting or arguing at home that worried you?’*
- The Pupil Voice Survey showed that LGBT+ young people, young carers and young women were more likely to respond positively to the same question, and that black and Asian young people were significantly less likely to report these incidents.

Based on this assessment, Bristol identified awareness-raising and workforce training as one of the main pathways to meet their population needs. The local workforce had reported that levels of awareness of the impact of parental conflict were patchy.

To inform how best to develop the workforce training, Bristol explored attitudes and skills through a workforce survey and in-depth interviews. The results showed that multi-agency training was preferred by the local workforce, and that it was important that the training provided information on the impact of parental conflict on children and young people’s outcomes. Respondents asked for guidance and techniques to challenge stigma in talking about couple relationships, and to assess and provide support across the spectrum of risk, from less severe conflict to domestic abuse.

* This question was about all conflict in the home and could therefore be between any family members. The question is about feeling worried, so it may not include young people who have experienced arguing and shouting but who do not report feeling worried.

Source: Taproot. (2019). Reducing parental conflict in Bristol: A review of evidence and practice, and recommendations based on stakeholder engagement.

RESOURCES

Questions on the local prevalence of parental conflict and risk factors

The table on the following page provides high-level questions that can be used to identify potential data to complete your RPC needs assessment. To conduct your needs assessment, you will need to make this process proportionate to local pressures, therefore you will probably select only some of these questions, or you might identify different, more contextualised questions. To simplify this process, you might also work with owners of existing datasets (for example, local leads on strategies such as family poverty, drug and alcohol abuse) which are likely to include similar data.

While all of these questions are based on some evidence, those in **bold** are about risk factors that, according to robust evidence, have a significant impact on parental conflict. For more information on how these factors can impact on parental conflict and child outcomes, we suggest that you look at the [RPC Outcomes Framework](#).

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Questions to identify potential data to complete your RPC needs assessment

Economic stress, family & household factors

For each question, is the prevalence higher for the vulnerable subgroups identified in Step 1?

What is the prevalence of families living below the national average income and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, average age, and ethnicity)?

What is the prevalence of families with one or both parents unemployed and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, average age, and ethnicity)?

What is the prevalence of homeless parents?

What is the prevalence of children receiving free school meals?

What is the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index score?

Parent's risk factors – health and wellbeing

For each question, is the prevalence higher for the vulnerable subgroups identified in Step 1?

What is the prevalence of parents diagnosed with a mental health condition and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)?

What is the prevalence of parents with longstanding illness or disability and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)?

Parent's risk factors – alcohol and substance abuse

For each question, is the prevalence higher for the vulnerable subgroups identified in Step 1?

What is the prevalence of parents with substance abuse problems and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)?

What is the prevalence of parents with alcohol abuse problems and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)?

TABLE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ►

Questions to identify potential data to complete your RPC needs assessment

TABLE CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE ◀

Children's experience	What is the prevalence of children who do not live with both parents and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)?	
Parental conflict	What is the proportion of families reporting relationship distress and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)? Is the prevalence higher for the subgroups identified in Step 1?	What is the prevalence of domestic abuse alerts which have no further action and could indicate parental conflict?

Questions on reach or take-up of services

It is important to bear in mind that data on reach or take-up of services cannot be used alone to identify your population needs. There are several reasons, such as motivational barriers or lack of required services, why some families who need RPC support may not access local services. Please consider that long waiting lists can be an indicator of unmet needs.

- What is the proportion of intact families accessing your local RPC services and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance, in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)? Is the prevalence higher for the subgroups identified in Step 1?
- What is the proportion of separated families accessing your local RPC services and what are their demographic characteristics (for instance, in terms of geographical location, family income, average age, and ethnicity)? Is the prevalence higher for the subgroups identified in Step 1?
- What is the length of your waiting list?
- How many hits are you receiving on RPC-related webpages?

RESOURCES

Sources of national and local data on relationship distress and family separation

You can use this data to make the case for relationship support and provide context for your own local data. To conduct your needs assessment, you will need to make this process proportionate to local pressures, therefore you will probably select only some of these data sources, or you might identify different databases.

National indicators on the prevalence of relationship distress

Indicator	Data source	Geographical coverage	Description	Association with parental conflict
Proportion of children in couple-parent families reporting relationship distress	Parental conflict indicator published by the Department for Work and Pensions, based on data from the Understanding Society survey .	UK	This indicator provides an estimate of the proportion of children affected by interparental relationship distress, where these children are from families where parents are still together. A couple-parent family is classified as experiencing relationship distress if either parent responds that 'most' or 'all the time' they consider divorce, regret living together, quarrel, or get on each other's nerves (in response to questions asking about their interparental relationship).	This is a direct indicator of children in families experiencing parental conflict.

TABLE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ►

National indicators on the prevalence of relationship distress

TABLE CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE ◀

Indicator	Data source	Geographical coverage	Description	Association with parental conflict
Proportion of children in separated families who see their non-resident parents regularly	Parental conflict indicator published by the Department for Work and Pensions, based on data from the Understanding Society survey . Cafcass data on the number of private law cases received may be a useful indicator of trends.	UK	This indicator provides a measure of the proportion of children in separated families being affected by interparental relationship distress. It is based on data from the resident parent on how often the child 'usually sees' the non-resident parent in term time and (separately) in holidays. The DWP have defined regularly as 'at least fortnightly' during term time.	Regular contact between the child and non-resident parent (i.e. the frequency and quality of contact) is a good indicator of a reasonable quality relationship between the parents.
Proportion of the UK adult population in distressed relationships	Relate's Relationship Distress Monitor, based on data from the Understanding Society survey .	UK	This provides an estimate of the proportion of the UK adult population in distressed relationships, where this includes couples that are married or cohabiting. It is based on 10 questions from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-32) which is then extrapolated to the UK population based on ONS population statistics.	This is a direct indicator of parental conflict.
National measures of wellbeing	Data published by the Office for National Statistics.	UK	This includes a regional breakdown and includes data on the number of people in fairly or extremely unhappy relationships, feelings of loneliness, and having a spouse, partner or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem.	This is a direct indicator of couple satisfaction.

National indicators on the prevalence of relationship distress

TABLE CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE ◀

Indicator	Data source	Geographical coverage	Description	Association with parental conflict
Percentage of children in need	Indicator published by Department for Education.	England	This reports data on children on child protection plans and gives a breakdown of the percentage of children in need by primary need at assessment, including family in acute stress and family dysfunction.	This is a direct indicator of children in families experiencing acute stress and family dysfunction.
Percentage of children receiving counselling through ChildLine reporting problems with family relationships	ChildLine annual reviews, based on NSPCC administrative data.	UK (restricted to areas where children use ChildLine)	This tells you the proportion of counselling sessions provided to children through ChildLine that were categorised as about family relationships. 'Family relationships' does not just involve parent relationships, but also relationships between siblings, and extended family.	This can be used as an indirect indicator of children in families experiencing parental conflict. Please consider that this percentage refers only to children supported through ChildLine counselling sessions.
Number of workless families eligible for targeted provision to reduce parental conflict in England	Indicator published by the Department for Work and Pensions, based on data from the Understanding Society survey .	UK	This provides an estimate of the number of workless families that are eligible for targeted provision to address parental conflict. It is based on three criteria: the youngest child is 18 or below; they are reporting relationship distress (estimated by the indicator number 1); and they are part of a long-term workless family.	This is a direct indicator of workless families experiencing parental conflict.

Local data on the prevalence of relationship distress and proxy measures

Risk factor	Data source	Geographical coverage	Association with parental conflict
Poor parental mental health	Public Health England publishes data on the prevalence of adult mental health difficulties. For parents specifically it may be possible to obtain data from local mental health services.	England	Evidence suggests that the mental health problems experienced by a parent can negatively affect the quality of the interparental relationship and parental conflict, and vice versa. To learn more, see the RPC Outcomes Framework .
Longstanding illness or disability	Data on health conditions or illnesses lasting more than 12 months is available at a local authority level from the Office for National Statistics' Annual Population Survey.	UK	Evidence suggests that the physical health problems experienced by a parent can negatively affect the quality of the interparental relationship and parental conflict, and vice versa. To learn more, see the RPC Outcomes Framework .
Low household income	The Office for National Statistics publishes gross disposable household income statistics at a local authority level. Regional data on households below average income is also available on gov.uk. Data on free school meals may also be a useful indicator.	UK	Evidence suggests that harsh economic conditions can affect the mental health and wellbeing of each parent, as well as the interparental relationship and coparenting. To learn more, see the RPC Outcomes Framework .
Worklessness	NOMIS and the Office for National Statistics publish regional data based on the Annual Population Survey, and NOMIS publishes data on rates of worklessness at a local level based on 2011 Census data.	UK	Evidence suggests that parents' employment can affect the mental health and wellbeing of each parent, as well as the interparental relationship and coparenting. To learn more, see the RPC Outcomes Framework .

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Local data on the prevalence of relationship distress and proxy measures

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Risk factor	Data source	Geographical coverage	Association with parental conflict
Problem debt	In 2016 the Money Advice Service published research estimating levels of problem debt. Levels of household problem debt are available at regional level from the Office for National Statistics, based on the Wealth and Assets Survey.	UK	Problem debt might be an indicator of harsh economic conditions, which can affect the mental health and wellbeing of each parent, as well as the interparental relationship and coparenting.
Drug misuse and alcohol problems	NHS Digital and the Office for National Statistics provide data on substance misuse as well as data on treatment for substance misuse . Local alcohol profiles are published by Public Health England, and NHS Digital publishes data on a range of statistics related to alcohol .	England	Substance misuse and heavy drinking have been identified as causes of parental conflict and couple satisfaction problems. For more information, see: Leonard, K. E., & Eiden, R. D. (2007). Marital and family processes in the context of alcohol use and alcohol disorders . <i>Annual Review of Clinical Psychology</i> , 3, 285–310.
Homelessness	The Government Statistical Service publishes data on statutory homelessness as well as an interactive tool on homelessness .	UK	

National prevalence of marriage, divorce and family separation

Indicator	Data source	Geographical coverage
Number of divorces in the UK	Published by the Office for National Statistics.	UK
Marriage rates in England and Wales per opposite-sex couples	Published by the Office for National Statistics. Marriage rates provide a better indication of trends than simply looking at the number of marriages.	England and Wales
Total number of separated families, number of children in those families, and proportion of families with a child maintenance arrangement	<p>Official statistics published by the Department for Work and Pensions and derived from a combination of administrative data and data from the Family Resources Survey. This link provides estimates of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the total number of separated families in Great Britain the number of children in those families the proportion of separated families with a child maintenance arrangement the proportion of families with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a 'statutory' child maintenance arrangement through the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) or its predecessor, the Child Support Agency (CSA); and a 'non-statutory' arrangement (any other child maintenance arrangement not arranged through the CMS or CSA and may include private 'family-based arrangements'). <p>Regularity of maintenance payments may indicate the extent of parental conflict in separated families and be worth reflecting in any local needs assessment on parental conflict.</p>	UK

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National prevalence of marriage, divorce and family separation

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Indicator	Data source	Geographical coverage
Divorce rate: persons divorcing per 1,000 married male/female population aged 16 and over	Published by the Office for National Statistics and collected directly from court data.	England and Wales
Number of divorces in Scotland	Published by the Scottish Government through the Civil Justice Statistics in Scotland bulletin.	Scotland
Numbers of divorces in Northern Ireland	Published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.	Northern Ireland
Percentage of all children who are not living with both their birth parents	Published by the Department for Work and Pensions as part of their Family Stability Indicator , based on the Understanding Society survey .	UK
Percentage of children in low-income households not living with both parents compared to the percentage of children in middle- to higher-income households	Published by the Department for Work and Pensions as part of their Family Stability Indicator, based on the Understanding Society survey.	UK