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# Appendix: Methodology

## Overview of the evidence

This review adopted a rapid evidence assessment methodology<sup>1</sup> which assesses what is already known about a policy or practice issue. This methodology uses a more structured and rigorous search of available evidence than a simple literature review but is not as exhaustive and resource intensive as a systematic review. Rapid reviews draw on systematic approaches and are transparent in detailing the search, appraisal, synthesis, and analysis methods of the review, but are pragmatic for applied policy research by constraining the process (such as the types of literature, search terms and quality appraisal) and not conducting exhaustive searches. In this case, priority was given to identifying existing reviews or meta-analyses to provide a rapid overview of relevant literature.

### Scoping and search strategy

In consultation with the Department for Work and Pensions and local areas, EIF identified new parents as a particular group of interest to explore how negative parental relationships in this population can impact child outcomes, and the role of risk factors. We define 'new parents or carers' as parents or carers in the first five years of parenthood of a child. This includes first-time parents or carers and parents or carers who already have a child or children. This definition is in consideration of the marked development children undergo during first few years of life, as well as the impact parents or carers have on children's developmental trajectory during this period.

1. The risk of parental conflict among new parents.
2. The factors that impact new parents' relationships.
3. The links between new parents' mental health and parental conflict.
4. The impact of parental conflict and low relationship satisfaction on new parents.
5. The impact of parental conflict between new parents on child outcomes.

Academic literature was searched using Google Scholar as the primary database (up to page 15 so as to reach theoretical saturation). Five separate searches were conducted for each of the topic areas noted above. Search terms utilised, including truncated words and \* for wildcard searches, were as follows:

1. "new parent\*" OR "new mother\*" OR "new father\*" OR "new carer\*" OR "pregnan\*" OR "newborn" AND "parental conflict" OR "marital conflict" OR "marital quality" OR "marital satisfaction" OR "relationship satisfaction" AND "UK" OR "United Kingdom"
2. "new parent\*" OR "new mother\*" OR "new father\*" OR "new carer\*" OR "pregnan\*" OR "newborn" AND "parental conflict" OR "marital conflict" OR "marital quality" AND "impact" OR "cause"

<sup>1</sup> Grant, M. & Booth, A. (2009) A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*(26) 2, 91–108

3. “new parent\*” OR “new mother\*” OR “new father\*” OR “new carer\*” OR “pregnan\*” AND “parental conflict” OR “marital conflict” OR “marital quality” AND “risk factors” OR “financial” OR “economic” OR “unemployment”
4. “anxiety” OR “mood” OR “depress\*” OR self-harm\* OR “suicid\*” OR “mental health” OR “mental” AND “parental conflict” OR “marital conflict” AND “new parent\*” OR “perinatal” OR “new mother\*” OR “new father\*” OR “new carer\*” OR “pregnan\*” OR “newborn”
5. “parental conflict” OR “marital conflict” AND “outcomes” OR “impact” OR “effect” AND “child\*” OR “newborn” OR “infant” OR “childbirth” AND “new parent\*” OR “new mother\*” OR “new father\*” OR “new carer\*” OR “pregnan\*” OR “newborn”

Grey literature was also sourced from a range of websites relevant to the topic area, including national and local government, the voluntary sector and research organisations. A list of references from the above sources/searches was retrieved. Duplicates were removed and the titles, abstracts and tags were screened first. Where it was unclear from abstracts/titles if they should be included in the review, full texts were screened. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows:

- **Types of literature:** priority was given to systematic reviews, literature reviews and meta-analyses that provide an overview of synthesis of the evidence. Primary studies were included if relevant.
- Grey literature documents (e.g., policy papers, and government/VCS reports from reliable sources) were included.
- **Date:** only papers published since 1 January 2011 were included.
- **Full text:** only papers with full text available were included.
- **Country of publication:** international papers were included, although UK (or UK comparison) studies were considered a priority.
- **Language:** only papers written in English were included.

In total 29 articles of relevance were identified across the review categories and included in this rapid review. It is worth mentioning that we found no evidence that examined parental conflict. We were not able to find evidence on new parents with protected characteristics, although we did not explicitly search for evidence on these groups.

### Evidence assessment and extraction

The 29 identified articles included in this review were quality appraised (QA) by one research officer to provide an indication of the methodological quality of the study. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool<sup>2</sup> was utilised for primary studies. Systematic reviews and meta-analysis articles were appraised through the the Quality Assessment Tool for Review Articles tool;<sup>3</sup> narrative review articles were appraised through the SANRA tool.<sup>4</sup> Evidence from each study was extracted and grouped according to the outcome domains measured, and in line with the outcomes of interest discussed in the introduction.

## Light-touch programme assessment

Three interventions have been assessed for this guide: Couple CARE for Parents; Mindful Transition to Parenthood; and Bringing Baby Home Workshop. These interventions have been selected because

2 Grant, M. & Booth, A. (2009) A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information and Libraries Journal* (26)2, 91–108

3 Health Evidence TM (2005). Quality Assessment Tool – Review Articles <https://www.healthevidence.org/documents/our-appraisal-tools/quality-assessment-tool-dictionary-en.pdf>

4 Baethge, C., Goldbeck-Wood, S., & Mertens, S. (2019). SANRA—a scale for the quality assessment of narrative review articles. *Research integrity and peer review*, 4(1), 1–7.

they are designed to support new parents and preliminary evaluation studies underpinning their evidence were identified. To conduct the light-touch assessment, we used the following approach:

1. We searched for impact evaluations of the selected interventions using the following search string on Google Scholar: impact OR evaluate OR evaluation OR intervention OR result OR affect OR effective OR efficacy OR efficacious OR trial OR study “intervention name”.
2. At least the first five result pages were screened for relevance of title and abstract, and where applicable full text level. Where there were relevant hits on pages four or five, three further pages were searched. Only papers with a full text available in English were included. We did not include time restrictions, and both peer-reviewed articles and grey literature were included..
3. We only assessed the most robust study. To select the most robust study, priority was given to impact evaluations which:
  - » Reported parent/interparental outcomes and measured child outcomes, or reported only child outcomes.
  - » Were conducted in the most robust way. For instance, we prioritised randomised controlled trials (RCTs) over quasi-experimental designs (QEDs), or selected studies with the larger sample or those reporting information on attrition or baseline equivalence.
  - » Were conducted in a country similar to the UK.

After having selected the most robust study underpinning each intervention, we conducted a preliminary assessment, examining the quality of the study design, sample, measurement, analysis and impact. The results of our assessment are described in the ‘Evidence’ column in the table below. None of the interventions we assessed reported child outcomes and instead only explored parental outcomes.

Please note that the other interventions included in the intervention table presented in the ‘BUILD’ section of the guide<sup>5</sup> were assessed as part of the **EIF Guidebook**. You can find out more about the evidence underpinning such interventions on the corresponding Guidebook page, in the ‘About the evidence’ section.

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5 Available at [www.eif.org.uk/resource/supporting-healthy-relationships-among-new-parents-a-practical-guide](http://www.eif.org.uk/resource/supporting-healthy-relationships-among-new-parents-a-practical-guide)

Intervention	Description	Evidence	References
<p><b>Couple CARE for Parents</b></p>	<p>Couple CARE for Parents is a universal programme for new parents and intact families. It is aimed at promoting positive couple adjustment to parenthood via skills training in areas including couple communication, conflict management, and partner support.</p>	<p>The intervention has evidence on interparental outcomes but not on child outcomes, from an RCT study conducted in Australia.</p> <p>The conclusions drawn from this study are limited by the lack of clarity of the treatment and control group, post-attrition and the lack of evidence of statistically significant positive impact on at least one EIF outcome.</p>	<p>Halford, W. K., Petch, J., &amp; Creedy, D. K. (2010). Promoting a positive transition to parenthood: A randomized clinical trial of couple relationship education. <i>Prevention science, 11</i>(1), 89-100.</p>
<p><b>Mindful Transition to Parenthood</b></p>	<p>Mindful Transition to Parenthood aims to extend research on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based approaches to a relationship education context.</p>	<p>The intervention has evidence on interparental outcomes but not on child outcomes, from an RCT study conducted in the US.</p> <p>The conclusions drawn from this study are limited by the small sample size (a minimum of 20 participants in each arm) and the lack of evidence of statistically significant positive impact on at least one EIF outcome.</p>	<p>Gambrel, &amp; Piercy, F. P. (2015). Mindfulness-Based Relationship Education For Couples Expecting Their First Child-Part 1: A Randomized Mixed-Methods Program Evaluation. <i>Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 41</i>(1), 5–24. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12066">https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12066</a></p>

Intervention	Description	Evidence	References
<p><b>Bringing Baby Home Workshop</b></p>	<p>The Bringing Baby Home psycho-educational workshop focused on four main goals: (1) maintaining and strengthening couples' intimacy; (2) changing conflict patterns so they became more constructive; (3) facilitating father involvement in the family; and (4) promoting positive parenting and coparenting to facilitate optimal infant development.</p> <p>Note: This evaluation study only examined the first goal (i.e., maintaining and strengthening couples' intimacy).</p>	<p>The intervention has evidence on interparental outcomes but not on child outcomes, from a US-based RCT study.</p> <p>The conclusions drawn from this study are limited by the small sample size (a minimum of 20 participants in each arm); the lack of clarity of the treatment and control group, post-attrition ; and the lack of evidence of statistically significant positive impact on at least one EIF outcome.</p>	<p>Shapiro, A. F., Gottman, J. M., &amp; Fink, B. C. (2015). Short-term change in couples' conflict following a transition to parenthood intervention. <i>Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice</i>, 4(4), 239–251. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000051">https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000051</a></p>