

UNDERSTANDING POLICE INVOLVEMENT IN RESPONDING TO CONFLICT BETWEEN PARENTS

This document provides a summary of a project that aimed to explore police involvement in responding to conflict between parents. We will be publishing a briefing aimed at police stakeholders and reducing parental conflict (RPC) partners in Spring 2025 based on the key findings.

Introduction

Strong local partnerships are essential for reducing the impact of conflict between parents on their children. Coordinated action between partners including the police, social work services, and Early Help teams ensures a joined-up approach that prevents conflict from escalating and addresses the broader needs of families. Police often encounter families in conflict, making their involvement key to early identification and referral to support, including to reducing parental conflict (RPC) services.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned Foundations to explore the ways that the police take action to respond to parental conflict. This project focuses on the perspectives of the police, exploring the reasons for lower or higher engagement with this agenda. In the areas that have reported high police engagement, we aimed to gain a greater understanding of how this has been achieved.

Engagement discussions

Ten online discussions were conducted with 14 participants, which included local area RPC leads, police staff and a Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner. We purposively sampled local areas to include areas of higher and lower police engagement. Stakeholder discussions explored what police involvement in local action to tackle parental conflict currently looks like, issues that involvement created for policing, and the perceived enablers, barriers and benefits to police's involvement.

Key findings

Most stakeholders believed that the police had or could play an important role in local action to tackle conflict between parents. Several implied that their general remit as police



officers, which included risk reduction, prevention, and early intervention, is highly compatible with the aims and goals of reducing and responding to parental conflict.

Police involvement in RPC was perceived by police and local area stakeholders to have several benefits, including de-escalation of conflict when it is occurring, stopping repeat incidents, and preventing harm to others. Police stakeholders appeared acutely aware of the emotional harms that parental conflict could have on children, and they could see clear benefits of police working in partnership with other agencies to prevent or reduce these.

Certain police teams were identified as having key opportunities to identify parental conflict early and signpost families to appropriate support. Neighbourhood teams, including Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), Early Help Officers and Vulnerabilities Officers were perceived to have the time, 'soft skills', experience and aligned interests, to do this work.

Police stakeholders indicated that involvement in local action to reduce conflict between parents created five key considerations for policing, requiring further attention:

1. **Help recognising parental conflict:** Inconsistent recognition was linked to gaps in training, officer experience, and limited time during callouts. Police professionals have found that bespoke training and collaboration, both with colleagues in their force, and local authority stakeholders, improves recognition of parental conflict.
2. **Support to understand the differences between parental conflict and domestic abuse:** Police stakeholders found it challenging to distinguish between the two, with calls for more tailored, scenario-based training, and a decision-making tool to improve identification and safeguarding. Training was most valued when it was short, clear, and incorporated real-life examples.
3. **Changing the way different domestic incidents are recorded:** Senior police stakeholders suggested an overhaul of the recording system to introduce a separate category for parental conflict to increase its visibility and encourage follow-up action.
4. **Clearer referral pathways:** Many officers were unaware of relevant support services, emphasising the need for clearer referral routes and wider awareness of options for families impacted by parental conflict.
5. **Whole-family support:** Police stakeholders were not aware of support for children and young people being developed as part of local RPC programmes and felt much of the emphasis was on working with parents. They wanted tools, resources and interventions to offer children and young people adversely affected by parental conflict. Several police stakeholders referenced various cases where the need for this support had become apparent.



Additional barriers to police engagement included difficulties identifying key contacts in the police, a lack of visibility for RPC training opportunities, and limited time and capacity to build relationships with families. The following enablers were seen as key to improving police involvement: senior leadership buy-in; tailored training; consideration of language and terms used with parents; and clear evidence of impact on policing outcomes.

Next steps

We will publish a briefing aimed at police stakeholders and RPC partners that explores the role that police professionals can play in identifying families where there is parental conflict, and signposting to support. The briefing, which will also include short case examples, will be published in Spring 2025.

In the meantime, here are some initial prompts to help police stakeholders consider how they can get more involved in work to reduce parental conflict.

Ask...	who leads on parental conflict in your police team or service and who is a reducing parental conflict champion?
Learn...	about training opportunities and resources in your area and share these with your team.
Find out...	about referral pathways and how parental conflict is recorded in your area.
Talk...	to other police and local authority staff with a reducing parental conflict role or interest.
Contact...	your local Early Help teams and local authority Reducing Parental Conflict leads to find out how police can get involved with multi-agency strategic boards, steering groups and networks that focus on parental conflict.
Plan...	to keep important reducing parental conflict contacts alive. If you or a colleague who leads on this is moving to another police team, or an important local authority contact is leaving their post, make sure replacement contact staff are introduced before you go to can continue the good work.
Review...	the work that your team or service do in relation to reducing parental conflict, how cases are recorded, and what data you provide local authority leads and other key stakeholders.