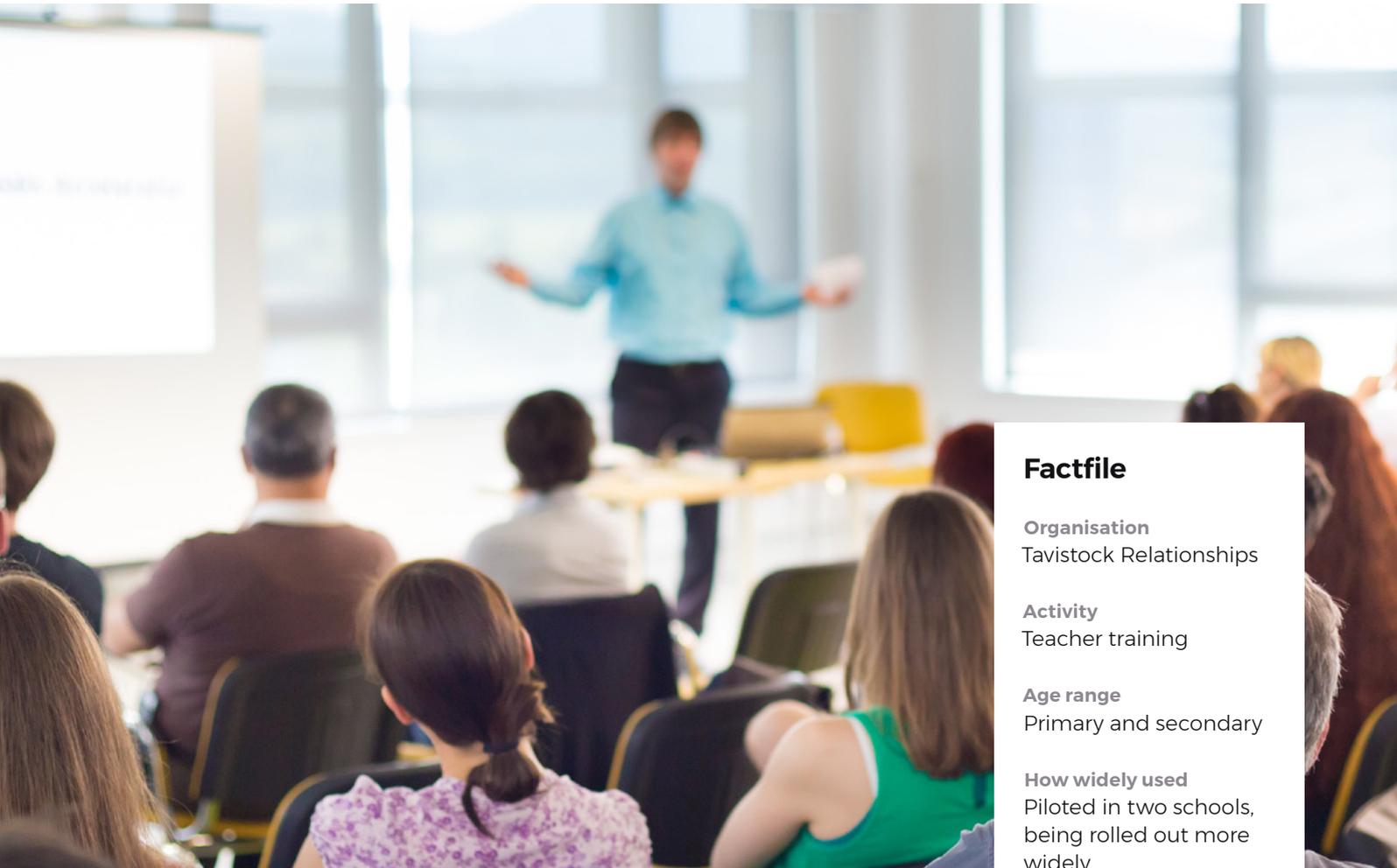


Supporting students through inter-parental conflict



Factfile

Organisation

Tavistock Relationships

Activity

Teacher training

Age range

Primary and secondary

How widely used

Piloted in two schools, being rolled out more widely

Teachers are learning about the signs of conflict between a child's parents and how to respond, with training from Tavistock Relationships.

Where conflict between parents is frequent, intense and poorly resolved, it can have a major impact on children and young people, increasing their anxiety, depression and aggression and affecting school attainment. One survey of more than 42,000 children receiving NHS mental health services showed that family relationship problems are implicated in more than 50 per cent of referrals. That is why Highgate School, in north London, invested in teachers' skills to support young people in this situation.

The school had already been committed to proactively supporting young people to navigate the challenging teenage years. So when it was approached by Tavistock Relationships to trial a teacher training programme around home conflict, it felt like a good fit, explains House Leader Verity Smith, 'We already had a well-resourced team thinking about wellbeing, but this course explained how to support young people whose parents were in conflict - an aspect that we wouldn't necessarily have held in the front of our minds.' Attendees gave the training an



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average score of 83% and it is now being rolled out more widely.

The course, delivered as a full-day or half-day workshop, is called 'Home is where the hurt is but school is where it shows'. It helps teachers to recognise and manage signs of inter-parental conflict. 'We learnt about things to look out for, such as a change in behaviour or suddenly becoming more withdrawn,' says Verity. 'The response involves trying to be curious about what is happening – talking to the child and colleagues, to build a fuller picture of what's going on in that child's life, rather than taking a disciplinary line.'

The course explains what the impacts of parental conflict can be on children (for example, it often harms the child-father relationship) and shares ways of working productively with parents on this issue. It advises schools to make sure parental conflict is incorporated into the wider RSE curriculum, rather than viewing it as 'an issue for counsellors'. This gives students the opportunity to consider parental relationships, understand more about arguments, recognise any impact on themselves, and feel that they can go to another adult if the conflict causes distress.

In Highgate, the programme did not chart entirely new territory, as the school already had a strong focus on wellbeing, explains Verity. As House Leader, she has pastoral responsibility for around 75 young people in years 9 to 13, working

alongside the Director of Wellbeing, two counsellors, a pupil welfare officer and the school chaplain. 'But it really helped to take the time out of our busy schedule and just focus on this one aspect,' she says.

'There is a common misconception that neglect is located only in deprived areas,' she adds. 'But more affluent children may experience neglect, where they fend for themselves despite living in a big house, or where parental tasks such as checking on homework are delegated.'

'Whatever their background, young people need our support to navigate today's complex social landscape and manage positive relationships,' she says. 'Among our students, friendships and relationships at home probably have more effect than anything else – on their schoolwork, their sense of identity, and their wellbeing. That's why we take their concerns very seriously.'

One survey of more than 42,00 children receiving NHS mental health services, family relationship problems are implicated in more than 50 per cent of referrals.

Learning points

Conflict between parents has a major impact on the wellbeing of children and young people.

Training can help teachers develop new techniques for working with parents and young people.

Training offers valuable time out to focus on a particular issue.
