



**Relationships Alliance briefing for meeting with Baroness Stedman-Scott OBE, September 2020**

*“Thank you so much. Our therapist was amazing and I truly believe this saved our relationship and improved our parenting. We are now working as a team and the whole family has felt the benefits.”*

Hertfordshire Parent who received an intervention through the RPC programme

From previous discussions with the Minister, we feel confident that she acknowledges and understands the links between the quality of couple and parental relationships and a host of health and social outcomes, both for adults and children.

As the Minister knows, because of the Coronavirus pandemic, families across the world are experiencing the threat or reality of illness, isolation and loss of social networks, unemployment, financial hardship and other difficulties.

We know that increases in family stress are likely to mean that greater numbers of children than ever before are exposed to the damaging effects of intense parental conflict.

Without initiatives to address this, the negative effects on mental health and on children’s development will be long-lasting. If Government does not fund targeted interventions to address the mental health consequences being felt by so many as a result of the pandemic, they will continue to be felt long after the acute danger of COVID-19 has passed.

In addition, given the clear link between healthy couple relationships and the capacity to find and sustain work, there are clear imperatives to invest in relationship support as a way of contributing to our economic recovery.

The Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme, including the innovative Challenge Fund approach is a platform for the Government to build on. The investment in the programme has created a ground swell nationally; this awareness and traction locally is critical to us supporting families emerging from lockdown. Although there have been challenges in delivery due to lockdown, the need to move to remote delivery, difficulties in establishing referral pathways in some of the CPAs; the majority of local authorities and delivery partners have shown that it is possible to address inter-parental conflict with populations who have never previously received

the kinds of interventions. This is testament to the investment made in the RPC programme.

The Relationships Alliance stands ready to deliver responsive services to support these fragile families. We are experienced in face-to-face delivery, blended practice, and app-based & web-based support which has accelerated by necessity over the last 6 months.

### **Next steps**

The Covid-19 experience, whilst a terrible event, represents a naturally occurring experiment, disrupting the old ways of delivering help. The Relationship Alliance has a great deal of learning to share on the move to digital delivery, the efficiencies and challenges.

The readiness of parents to accept digitally delivered help and make such good use of it has been remarkable.

Ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review, we urge the Government to build on the investment made in the RPC programme, which has already produced some very promising results for couples and families. The Challenge Fund has proven to be an innovative and efficient method of developing responsive interventions for families.

Now is the time to broaden the focus to encompass the place of relationship support in all its forms – including early intervention digital approaches, so that we can begin to realise the benefits of such support in relation to improved children's developmental outcomes, adult mental health outcomes and wider public health impacts.

We acknowledge the Government's desire to situate the delivery of relationship support within Family Hubs. Although not fully articulated by Government, we look forward to discussing with Ministers and officials how best to do this.

Workforce training is another important element of the relationship support picture, we are willing and eager to help with future shaping and delivery of this.

The Relationships Alliance has long advocated a spectrum of relationship support, and we still hold to the view that such support can and should take many guises.

Relationship support requires future commitment and would benefit from a champion within Government - whether that be a Minister for the Family, or some other point of coherence - to hold the ring for the range of support which we believe is necessary. This would assist in enabling joined up thinking across government, for example between DHSC, DWP and MoJ around areas such as Couple Therapy in IAPT (one of the most highly effectively approaches to tackling depression and/or anxiety), couple

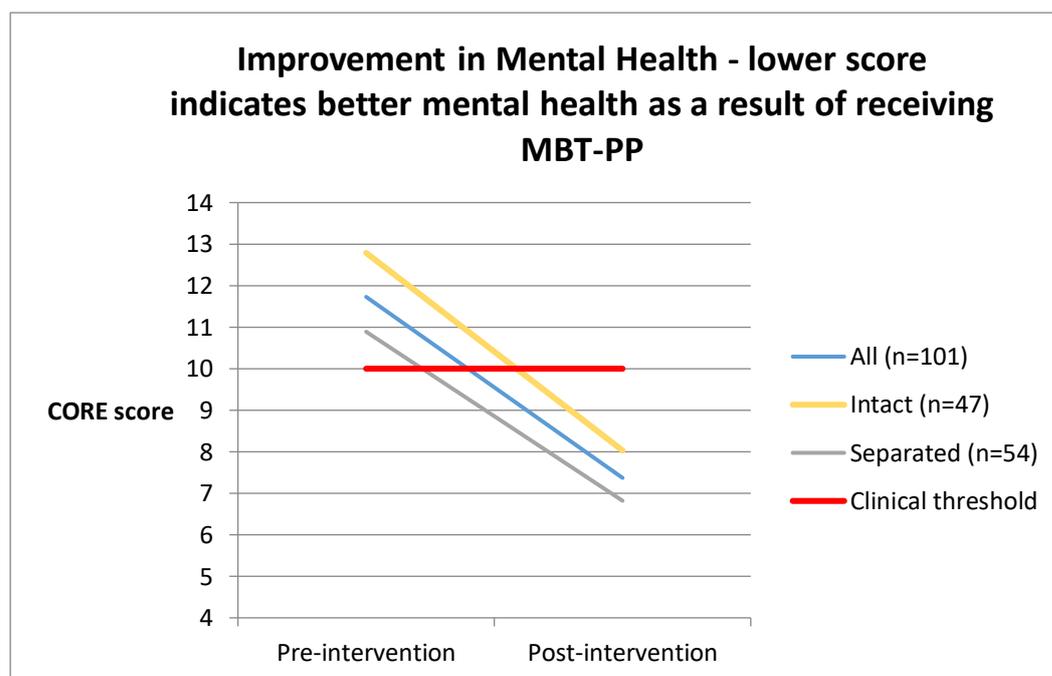
work with parents of children being seen by CAMH Services where the presenting difficulties are caused or exacerbated by parental conflict, relational approaches to care in older age, improved care and support for parents and children post-divorce/separation aftercare.

## Data

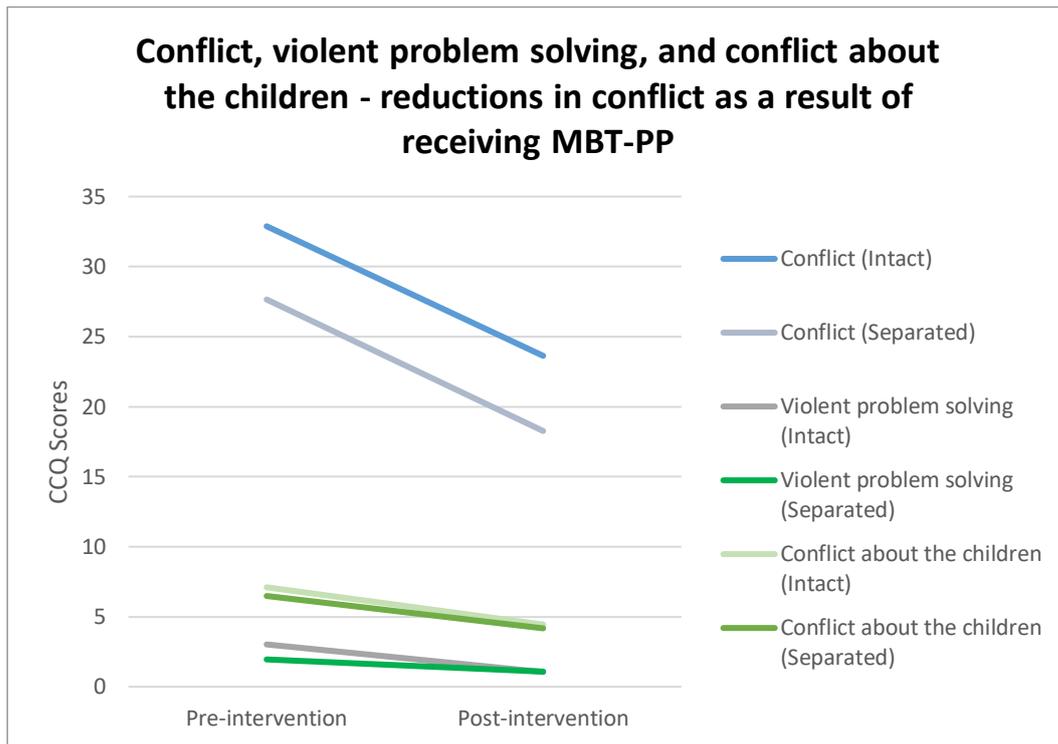
Below, we would like to highlight the impressive outcomes so far achieved by the RPC programme.

Mentalization-based Therapy (delivered in both the Hertfordshire and Gateshead Contract Package Areas) *Parents under Pressure* reveals striking results:

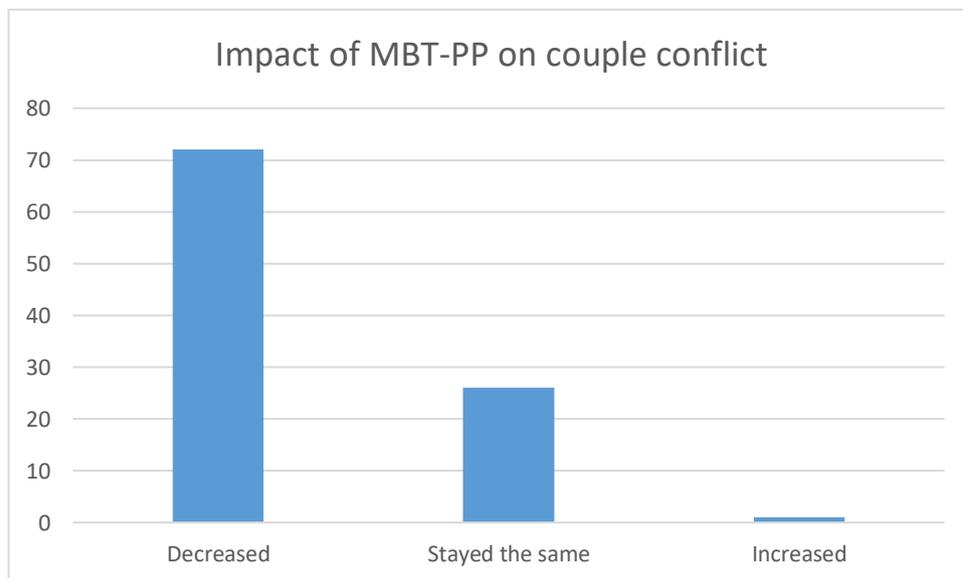
- **There was a (statistically) significant improvement in parents' mental health** among parents who provided CORE scores before and after the intervention, and whose score before the intervention indicated they were experiencing a clinically significant level of psychological distress.

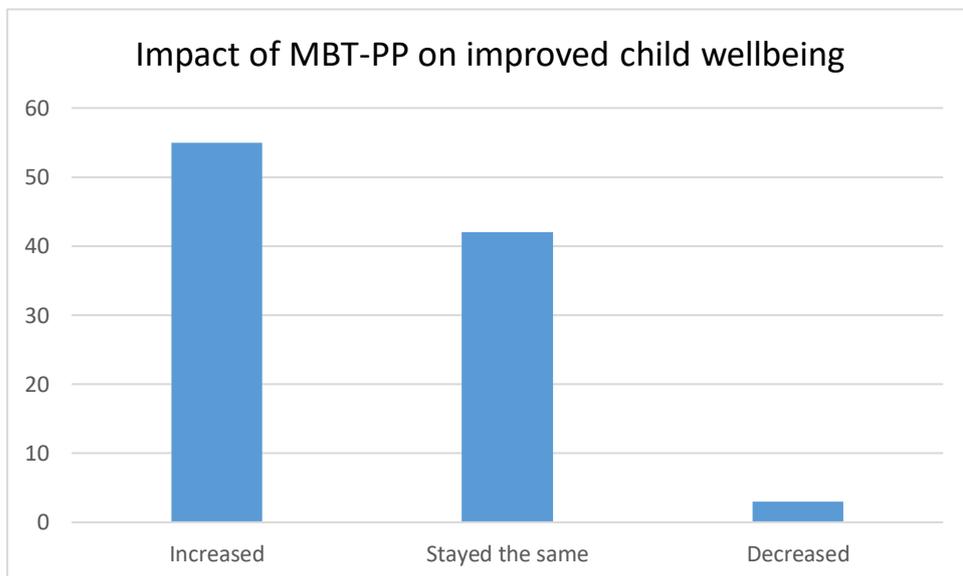
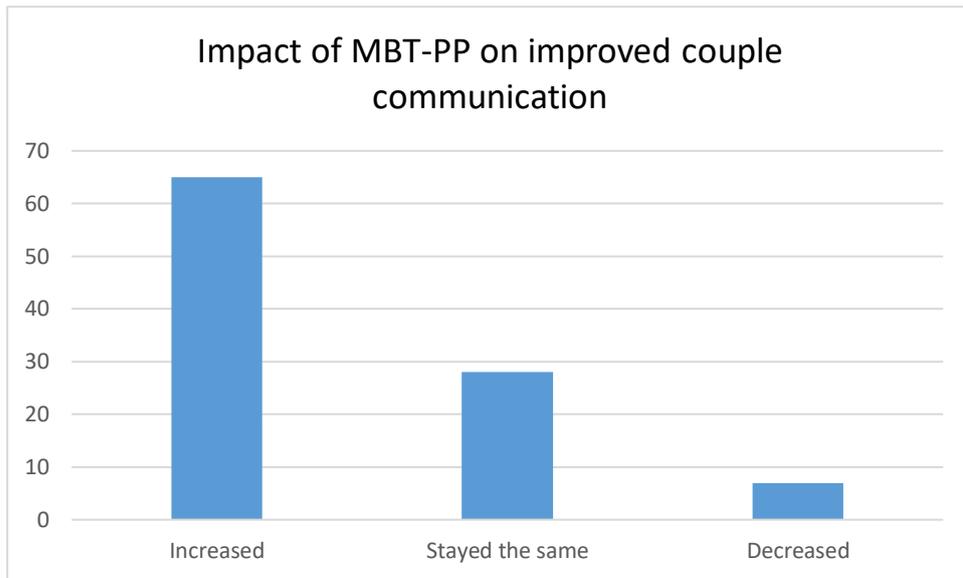


- **There was a (statistically) significant reduction in conflict between parents in intact relationships and separated relationships, violent problem solving for parents in intact relationships and for parents in separated relationships, and conflict about the children for parents in intact relationships and for parents in separated relationships.**



- **For the majority of the participants, conflict in the relationship decreased, communication with their co-parent increased, and their child/children’s wellbeing improved after the intervention** (see *How Mentalization-Based Therapy for Parents is improving couple communication, reducing parental conflict and increasing child wellbeing* for the full analysis).

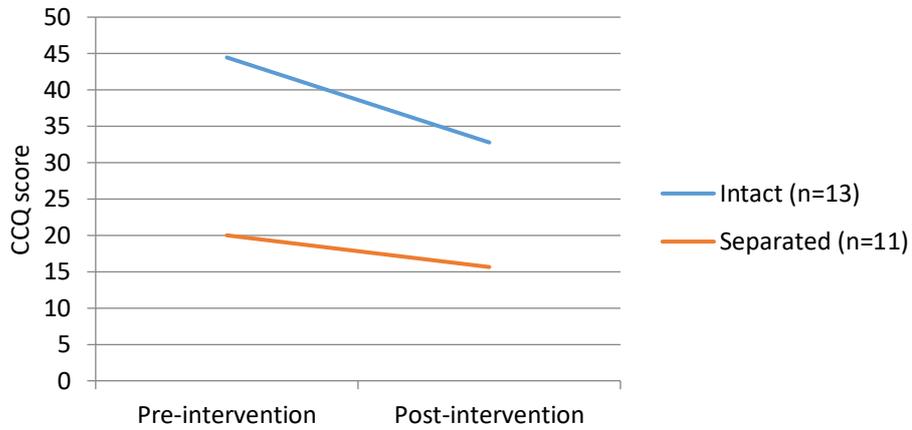




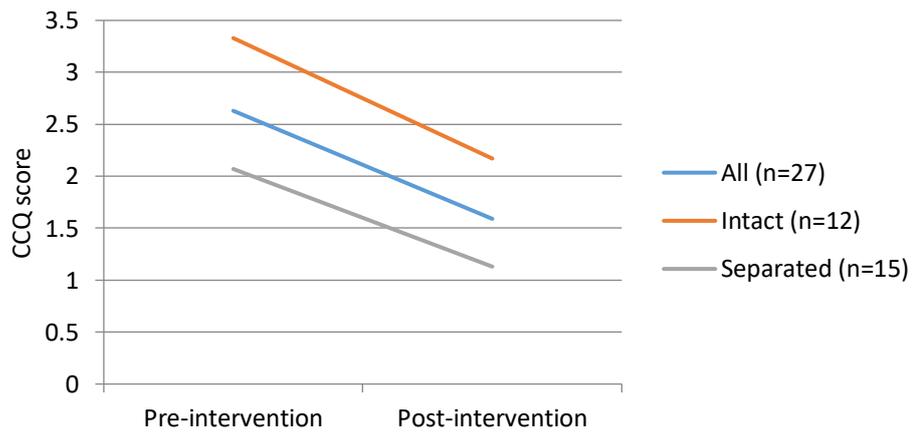
The results for three of the other interventions, Triple P enhanced (45%), Triple P Family Transitions (53%) and Within My Reach (2%), are similarly positive.

**With the majority of the parents in this cohort exhibiting intense problems with their partner/co-parent at intake, data analysis finds significant reduction in conflict between parents in intact relationships, significant reduction in violent problem solving for all parents, and significant reduction in conflict about the children for all parents:**

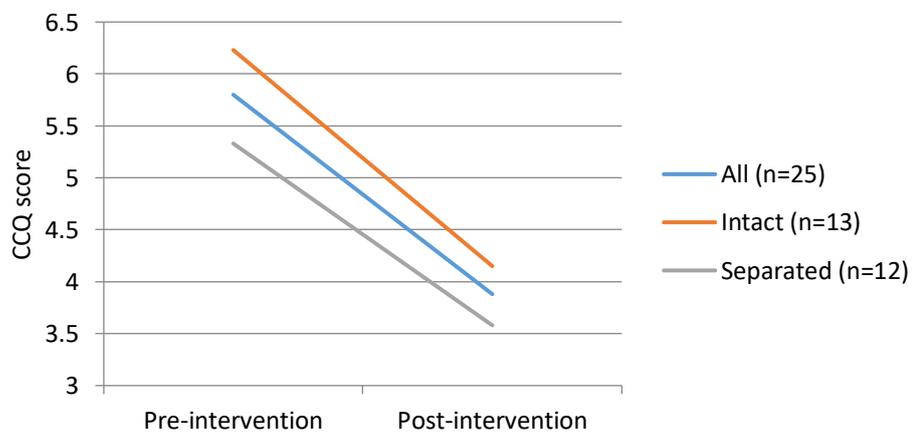
### Conflict between parents- reductions in parental conflict from RPC interventions



### Reductions in violent problem-solving between parents as a result of RPC interventions



### Reductions in conflict about children as a result of RPC interventions



In relation to the Challenge Fund, the sector can point to encouraging results from the testing of novel innovations, such as:

*Me You and Baby Too (MYBT)*

- An intervention for new parents, delivered through Best Beginning's Baby Buddy app (in association with OnePlusOne)
- Statistical analysis of 333 of the 7334 users of the app showed a significant increase in relationship quality and reduction in conflict from the digital intervention.
- Qualitative data indicated that Family Support Workers found MYBT filled a gap in current provision, enabling them to open up difficult conversations with parents.
- Feedback from practitioners suggests that MYBT was well-received by parents and increased their service users' awareness of conflict, and stimulated thinking and conversations about how to change behaviours.

*See it Differently (SID)*

- A project delivered by the Good Things Foundation (which aims to increase literacy and digital capability among their users many of whom do not have English as their first language) and One Plus One, to co-create online content in order to raise awareness of the impact of parental conflict on children and parental intentions to change behaviour.
- The seeitdifferently.org.uk site had 6649 unique page views.
- Feedback from users in the digital and supported approaches show greater awareness of how they argue and constructive conflict skills. More parents felt able to use those skills, and intended to do so next time they argued with their partner.
- Those who attended the community sessions had put their learning into practice and cited actions such as being more measured in their behaviour, curbing anger, and being more mindful of how they behave in the presence of a child.

We look forward to discussing these matters when we meet.

***Briefing produced by the Relationships Alliance, a consortium comprising the four leading relationship support charities – Marriage Care, One Plus One, Relate and Tavistock Relationships.***