

Working with Parents in Conflict

How do I
support parents?

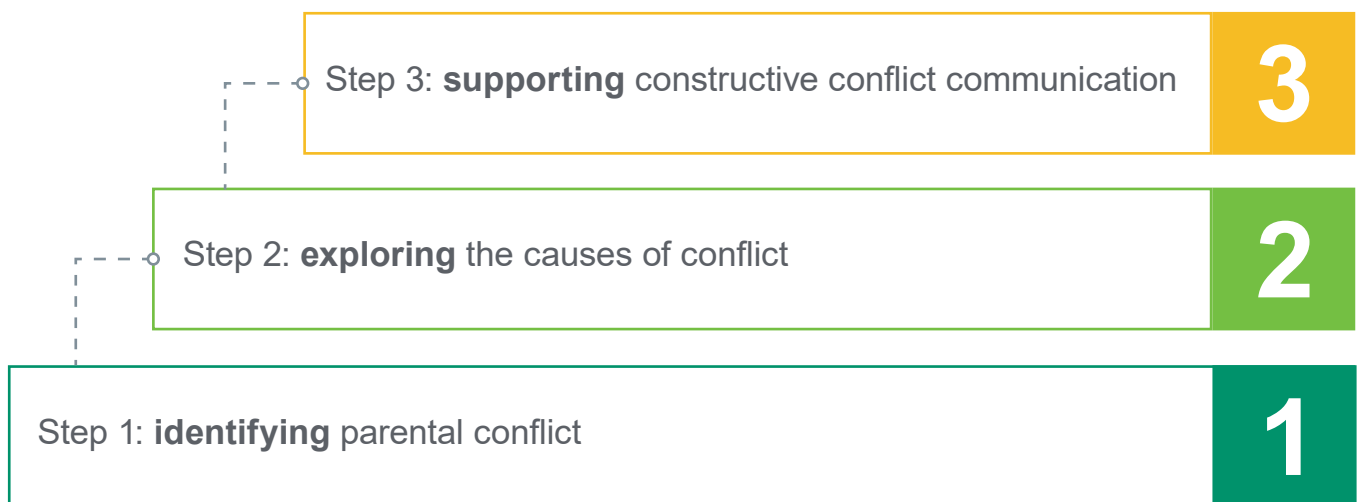


What the evidence tells us

Conflict between parents is normal, but if exposure is frequent, intense and poorly resolved, this can have a damaging impact on children, resulting in long-term mental health issues and emotional, social, behavioural and academic problems as they grow up.

However, you can use these tools to work with parents by enhancing their relationship.

Our framework for working with parents



Enhancing inter-parental relationships to improve child outcomes

The quality of the interparental relationship is recognised as a primary influence on effective parenting practices and children's long-term mental health and future life chances.

Children of all ages can be affected by destructive interparental conflict, with effects evidenced across infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The context of the wider family environment is an important factor that can protect or exacerbate child outcomes in response to exposure to interparental conflict.

To work effectively with couples/co-parents we should:

- Use active, empathetic listening
- Use open questions
- Use probing prompts
- Reflect our understanding
- Summarise what we have heard

Tools for working with parents in conflict

The following list shows the tools you reviewed as part of your training plus a couple of extra that we feel are useful.

You'll also have tools in your everyday kit that you can use to work with parents.

The tools themselves are provided on the following pages for you to photocopy and use with parents.

Stage 1 – Identifying parental conflict

- **Relationship scaling tool (page 4)** – Use this to explore how each parent rates their situation on the scale from happy to distressed. This can highlight differences in how they are experiencing their relationship.
- **Stages of relationships (page 5)** – This model shows how relationships evolve over time. The way in which a partner deals with challenges determines the quality of the relationship.

This model helps to 'normalise' the difficult phases and reminds them that things can get better. It is often during the transition between these stages that conflict occurs.

Stage 2 – Exploring the causes of the conflict

- **What's going on for us? (VSA – page 6)** – Using the VSA model helps parents understand the connection between stressful life events, the parents' past histories, and the methods they use to cope with stress or conflict, by asking them to reflect on these questions.
- **Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour (page 7)** – This model can be used to help couples to recognise how they internalise behaviour that they observe which in turn affects how they feel, impacting on their response. This can be used to help couples understand each other's behaviour.
- **Our typical day (page 8)** – Use this table to identify how the family see their typical day. You can use this during discussions with the parents or you can ask each parent to complete and bring one to the next session. Once completed, ask them to consider when conflict is more likely to happen and what triggers it. Use this information to discuss what they could change to address and better manage conflict.

Stage 3 – Supporting constructive conflict communication

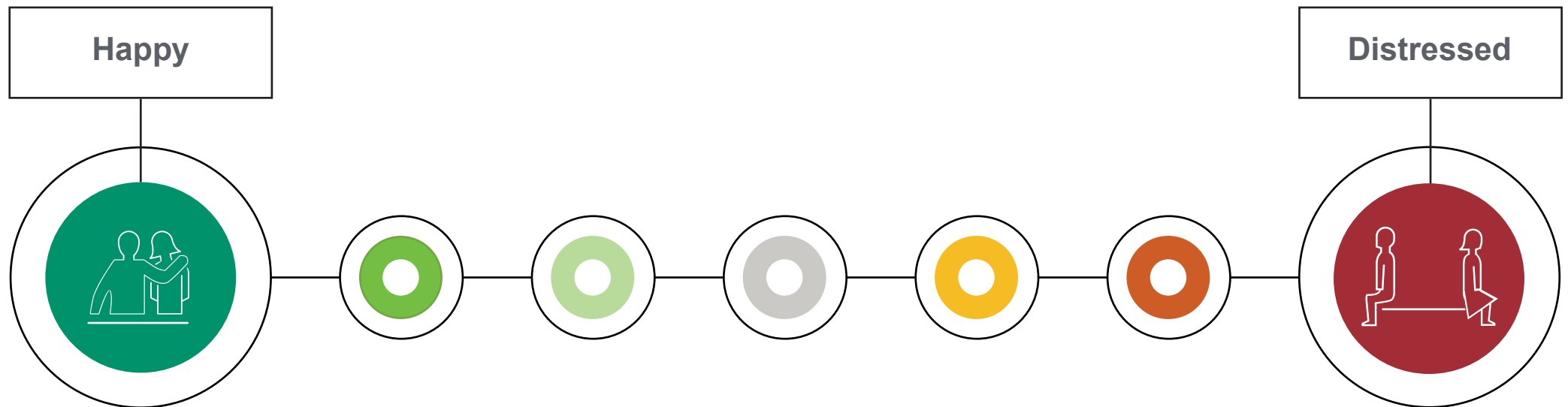
- **Constructive or destructive prompt cards (page 9-12)** – These cards give some examples of constructive and destructive behaviours within conflict and can be used with families in a variety of ways to help them explore what is going on for them now and help them plot a path to take in the future.

You may not feel that all the cards are suitable for the family that you are working with, in that case take some out and if the cards do not cover some of the issues you have identified in a family – consider creating your own (there are blank cards provided). Use the grid provided to explore how often these behaviours are demonstrated.

- **Role Cards (page 13)** – Ask parents to review these cards and give examples of situations they might get into and consider the role they are asking the child/ren to take on.
- **You vs. I statements (page 14-17)** – Use these cards to help parents to describe how they feel in a constructive way by using 'I' statements instead of 'You' statements to prevent conflict.

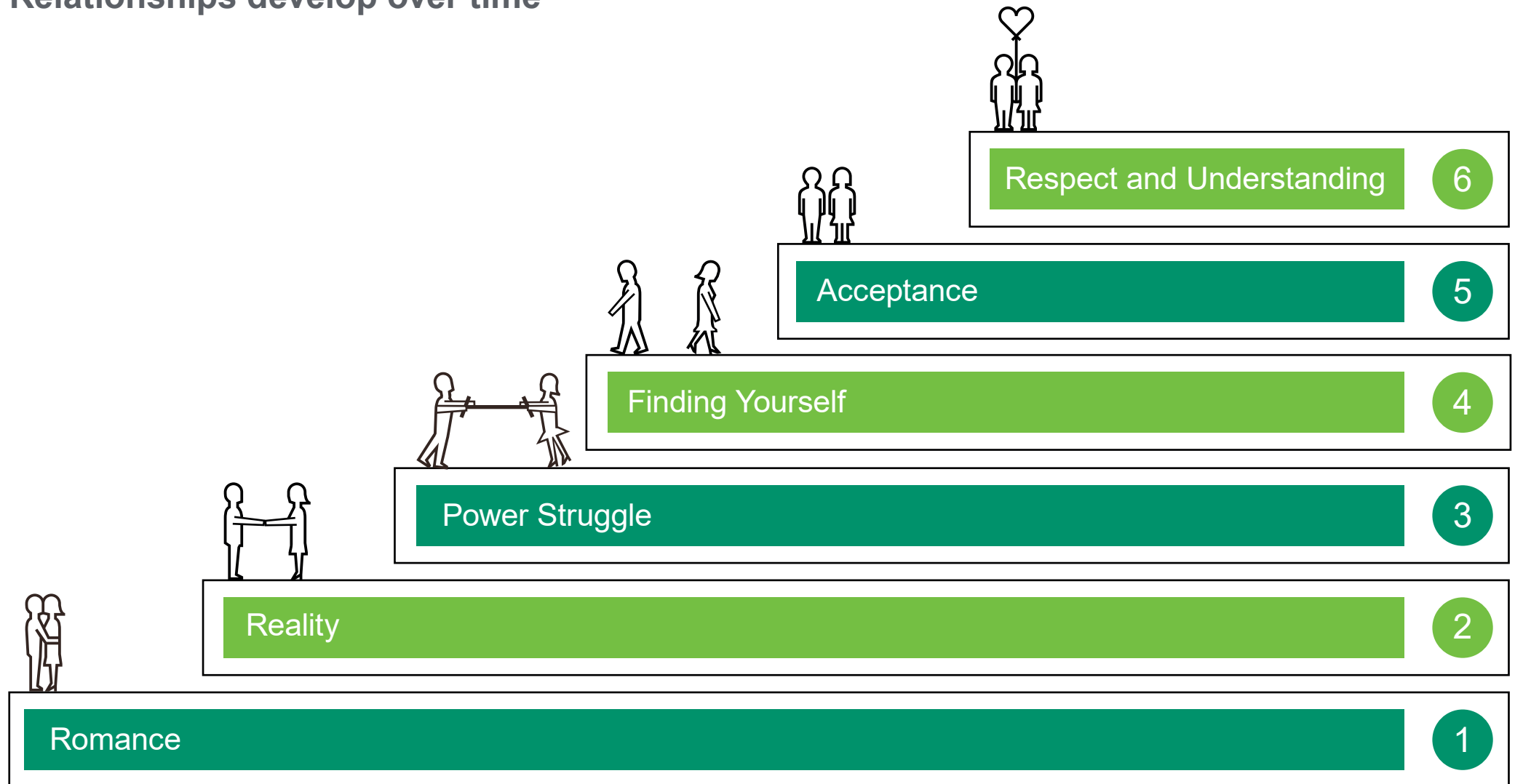
Relationship Scales

How are we doing?



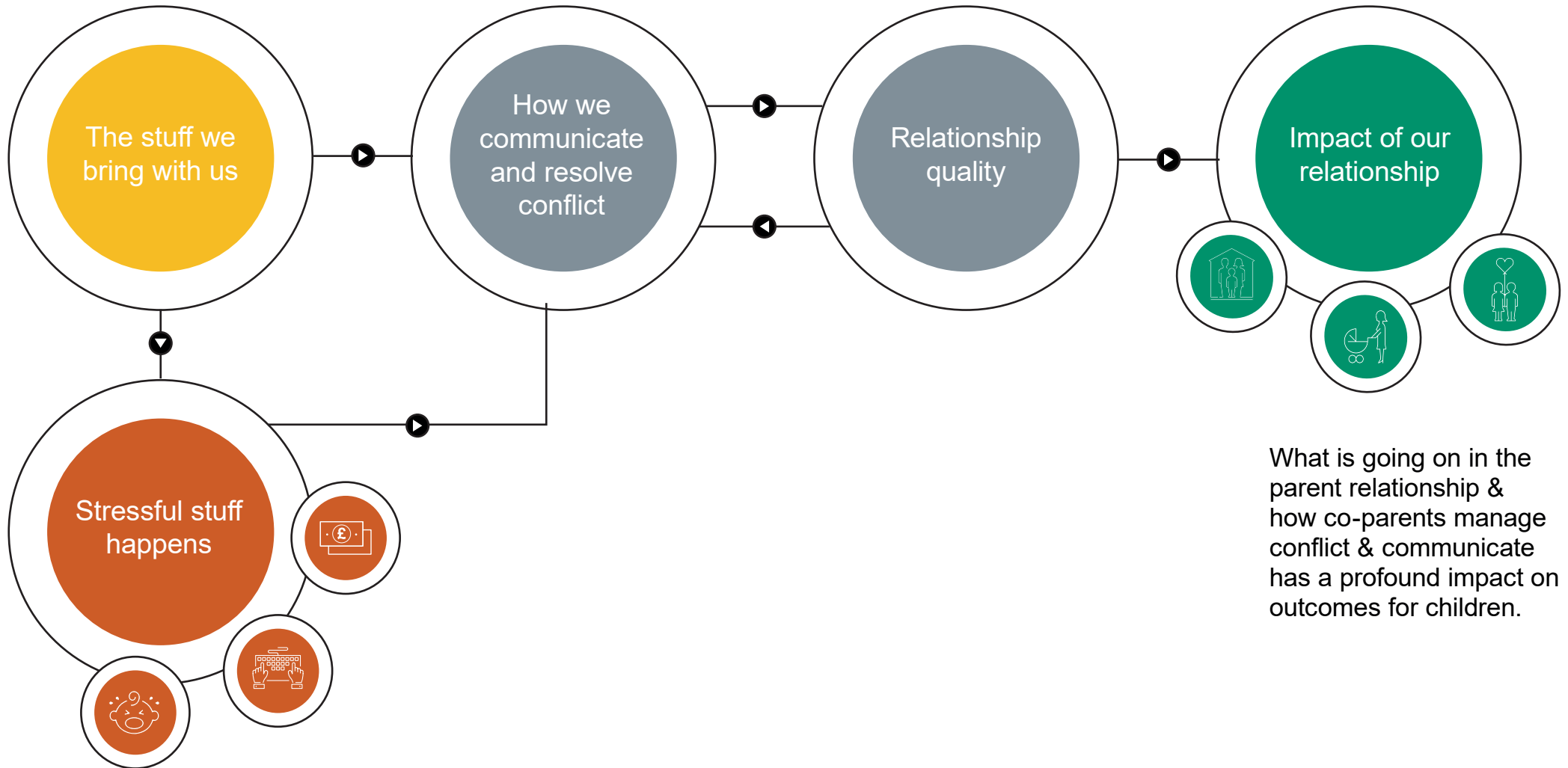
Stages of relationships

Relationships develop over time



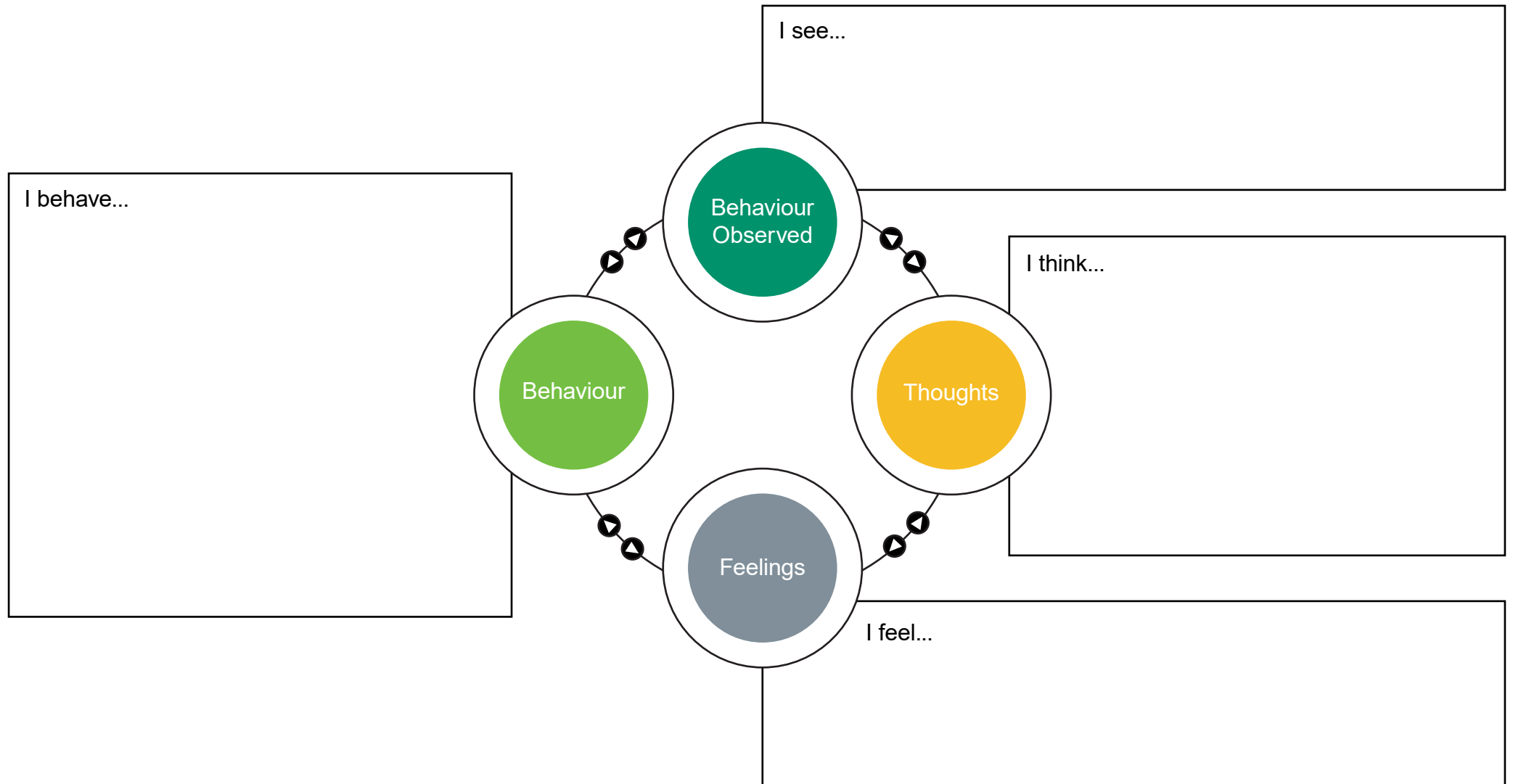
What's going on for us

Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model



What is going on in the parent relationship & how co-parents manage conflict & communicate has a profound impact on outcomes for children.

Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour



Our typical day

	What my day looks like	Triggers to conflict
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		
Night		

Constructive or destructive

These cards give some examples of constructive and destructive behaviours within conflict.

Asking each other's point of view

Interrupting to get your
point of view across

Listening to the other point
of view without interrupting

Withdrawing from the conversation
as it's not going your way

Recognising that whilst you may not agree, your partner has a valid point

Allow each other the opportunity to express your views

Tell your partner what they should do

Using examples from the past to prove you're right

Interrupting your partner whilst they are speaking

Allow each other the opportunity to express your views

Tell your partner what they should do

Using examples from the past to prove you're right

Pointing out your partner's flaws when they support your argument

Using insults to make your point and share your feelings

Choosing the right time

Raising your voice to make sure you get your point of view across

Explaining how the situation
is making you feel

Considering issues from
somebody else's point of view

Offering possible solutions to
problems but be willing to compromise
and listen to other suggestions

Having a solution in mind to the
problem and don't change your mind

Check out what you agree about

Show you understand the
other person's point of view

Ending an argument both feeling
that you have been heard

Ending an argument upset and angry

Starting an argument as soon as
my partner walks in the door

Accepting that you might disagree

Keep repeating your views until your
partner recognises you are right

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In our relationship we...

Always

Sometimes

Never

Role Cards

Review these cards and give examples of situations you and your partner might get into and consider the role you are asking your child/ren to take on.

The Confidant

The Mediator

The Spy

The Judge

The Messenger

When your child feels they have to be the mediator between parents, keeping everyone happy and solving problems

When you share too much information with your child and expect them to fill the gap due to a lack of intimate communication with your partner or ex

When you ask your child to take information between you and your partner about money, contact etc.

When you criticise your partner or ex and expect your child to decide who is right or wrong

When you ask your child questions about your partner or ex and rely on them to find out what is going on

You and I statements

Use these cards to help parents to describe how they feel using 'I' statements instead of 'You' statements.

You care more about work
than your own family

You never pay me any attention,
you just don't find me attractive

You're always on the phone texting,
on Facebook. You care more about
someone else's opinion than mine

You never hear me, you
don't understand me

You always take your
mother's side over mine

You never back me up when
I am dealing with the kids

You never have any time for me

You're more interested in what goes on in
East Enders than our lives

You deliberately stay at work
to avoid bathing the kids

You are happy to spend
money on what you want,
but not on what I want

You don't bring in enough money
to buy everything we need

You spend more time at your parents
house than you do at home

You are always late and
you're so unreliable

You never take your share
of the kids taxi service

You're not interested in
anything I do anymore

You contradict me all the time
when I am speaking to the kids

You leave me to do all the tough parenting, so the kids like you more than me

You spend money without thinking and don't watch the budget

You don't care about me and ignore me, you never call or text me when you're out

You don't help out enough, you just expect me to clean up after you

Today I enjoyed...

I was surprised at...

Something I'm not sure about is...

Today I struggled with...

I would like us to start...

I would like us to stop...

I don't understand why...

I would like us to keep...

I need help with...

I have support from...

Things go wrong when...

I get irritated by...

I feel anxious when...

It would be great if...

I struggle to...

I relax when...

I enjoy when...

I can help when...