



Let's talk about... Conflict

Handout #4: How do children adapt to parental conflict?

Watch Chapter 4 – Let's talk about how children of different ages adapt to conflict here: <https://bit.ly/2YNJDcD>

TAKEAWAY MESSAGE

While children of all ages are sensitive to parental conflict, they adapt in different ways. Severe parental conflict may lead to a range of behavioural, emotional, academic, health, and social problems in your child.

MAIN CONTENT

A plant can sense and cope with harsh conditions such as drought by slowing or stopping growth, redirecting energy resources to protect itself from stress-related damage. Similarly, your child may try to control their experience of parental conflict in various ways to regain a sense of emotional security, which can be a drain on their developmental energy to grow.

Prenatal: Mothers who are stressed by conflict or the experience of violence during pregnancy can over-produce the stress hormone, cortisol, which can lead to long-lasting changes in their unborn child's brain.

0-4 years: Parent conflict is particularly tough for children, as they are not born with any ability to control, or escape, the stress they feel. To cope, they may become watchful and jumpy, or very withdrawn.

5-12 years: Children typically may want to help parents in conflict by trying to distract them by misbehaving or stepping in.

13-17 years: Teenagers are more likely to try to avoid the conflict, often by hiding in their rooms, or being at other friend's houses.

Children who witness severe and ongoing parental conflict may display:

- 'Acting out' (disruptive, impulsive, angry, or hyperactive behaviours)
- 'Holding in' (depression, anxiety, and withdrawal)
- Academic problems (learning, poor school grades)
- Health problems (digestive problems, fatigue, reduced physical growth, headaches, abdominal pains, difficulty sleeping)
- Social and relationship problems (such as difficulty making and keeping friends).

TAKE A MOMENT

Consider whether and how your conflict might be related to your child's behaviours. Do they happen on a regular basis? Are they distressing to your child and those around them? Do they persist over a period of time (a month or longer) or across situations (at home and at child care/school)? If so, it might be time to get support or advice.

Acknowledgements

Let's Talk About Conflict © was written by Jennifer E. McIntosh and Craig Olsson from the Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development (SEED), Deakin University. It was produced by Relationships Australia South Australia.

All videos in the series can be view here: www.rasa.org.au/letstalkabout

For more information on this product please refer to the introduction video at <https://bit.ly/2K78Vyy>