

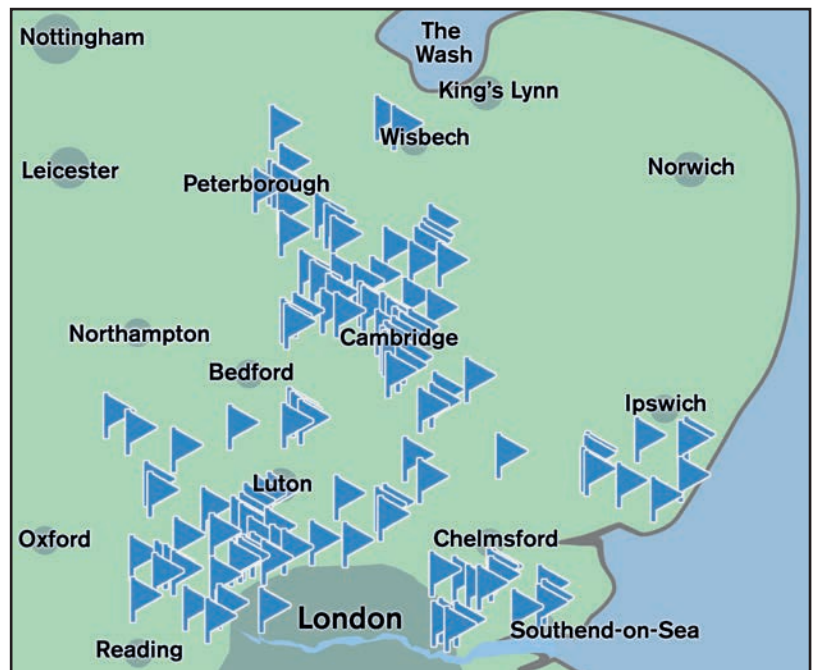
Delivering online interventions through the Reducing Parental Conflict programme – reach, safety, take-up and outcomes

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the ensuing lockdown and tiered restrictions, necessitated an immediate switch to online delivery of the interventions being trialled through the Government's Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme. This briefing highlights the impact of the switch to online intervention delivery during the pandemic.

Geographical reach

- The DWP and Tavistock Relationships had frank and open discussions before the latter was appointed prime contractor for two of the four CPAs around the challenges and feasibility of recruiting sufficient numbers of parents in rural and more remote communities within those CPAs.
- The DWP made it clear, reasonably enough, that they were seeking a geographical spread of delivery, and that simply concentrating on urban areas would not suffice. While we acknowledged that this was always going to be a challenge for organisations delivering the programme, we devised a strategy in order to try to fulfil this aspect of the programme.
- In the event, however, lockdown and the tiered restrictions – which have necessitated the wholesale movement to online delivery – have resulted in the delivery of interventions to parents across a far wider geographical spread that we would ever have believed possible, even assuming our strategy had performed optimally.



The map above shows high level postcode areas for parents who received RPC intervention in the Hertfordshire CPA between March 2020 and 1 December 2020.

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- The map clearly demonstrates the enormous breadth of delivery that has been taking place, and which continues to take place since the programme delivery went online.
- We are reaching parents as far north as the remote areas around The Wash, rural parts of North Cambridgeshire, remote parts of North East Essex and the less well-connected parts of Buckinghamshire.
- Delivery is taking place in more populated areas, as would be expected, but this map demonstrates that there are many, many parental couples now receiving interventions to reduce parental conflict who would, in all likelihood, never have been reached by the RPC programme had all delivery remained face to face.

Although this has come about due to the most unfortunate of circumstances, for those parents in remote areas of these counties who have received interventions, and for their children, the move to online delivery has been nothing but a plus.



Safety and risk

- The safety of participants is always the primary concern when working with parents in conflict.
- At Tavistock Relationships, we take the utmost care to ensure that the work we do is thoroughly risk-assessed, and work will only proceed if we are confident that neither parent, nor their children, are at risk of harm.
- In relation to the mentalization-based therapy for parents that we, and our sub-contractors, are delivering, assessing for risk – in the context of high conflict couples – is of paramount importance.
- This therapy seeks to address and defuse heightened states of dysregulated emotion such as hostility and aggression.
- We have found that the physical separation which doing this work via Zoom has necessitated for many couples (i.e. two separated parents dialling in from their separate homes rather than having to sit together in the same room) has instead proved extremely helpful therapeutically, in that it reduces the amount and intensity of acting out/unmentalized behaviours which we can sometimes see in face-to-face work.

In essence then, rather than being an element of the work which increases risk, the delivery of mentalization-based therapy remotely has the effect of minimising risk, and of optimising the circumstances under which beneficial work for the parents can take place.



For Tavistock Relationships, this is a real equalities triumph, as geographical location no longer prevents access and the possibility of positive change.

The two central points of this briefing are:

- the geographical reach of the programme, and
- the safety of online delivery – because we believe that while web-based and app-based relationship support have their place, these can never achieve the results which evidenced-based interventions being delivered by suitably trained and qualified practitioners can deliver to parents – and crucially, to their children.

Online delivery resulting in increased take-up

- Geographic reach via online work has much enhanced our capacity, and that of subcontractors, to form and run groups.
- Prior to lockdown we spent as much as three months finding a venue and a date to suit parents, and we had several refusals as our selected venue was too far away, and the afternoon we had been offered was not suitable.
- This has been true for all the organisations trying to put groups together within both CPA 1 and CPA 3.
- During lockdown, however, we have formed and run six groups, and are planning at least four more before the end of March.

- Overcoming distance and parental travel has been key, it has also helped us offer this opportunity to parents who would not otherwise have contemplated taking up such an offer.
- We are delighted that technology has allowed us to put groupwork interventions through the test of actual delivery. And also very heartened to learn, from our own methodologically robust analysis, that they have been very successful with expected outcomes met and, in some cases, exceeded.
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Outcomes

Analysis of data from both the Hertfordshire and Westminster CPAs evidences statistically significant improvements in the mental health of parents who were experiencing psychological distress at the beginning of the programme, as well as on all the other key variables that the programme seeks to improve:

- conflict between parents in intact relationships and separated relationships;
- violent problem solving for parents in intact relationships and for parents in separated relationships;
- conflict about the children for parents in intact relationships and for parents in separated relationships.

For the majority of families, their child/children's wellbeing improved as a result of the intervention.

It is remarkable to be able to show significant results on these key variables. **It is notable that this analysis of our outcomes measures demonstrates that online delivery is as effective as face-to-face working.**

