

Tools for working with parents in conflict

Identifying parental conflict

- ✓ Relationship scaling tool
- ✓ Stages of relationships

Exploring the causes of the conflict

- ✓ What's going on for us? (VSA)
- ✓ Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour
- ✓ Our Typical Day

Supporting constructive conflict communication

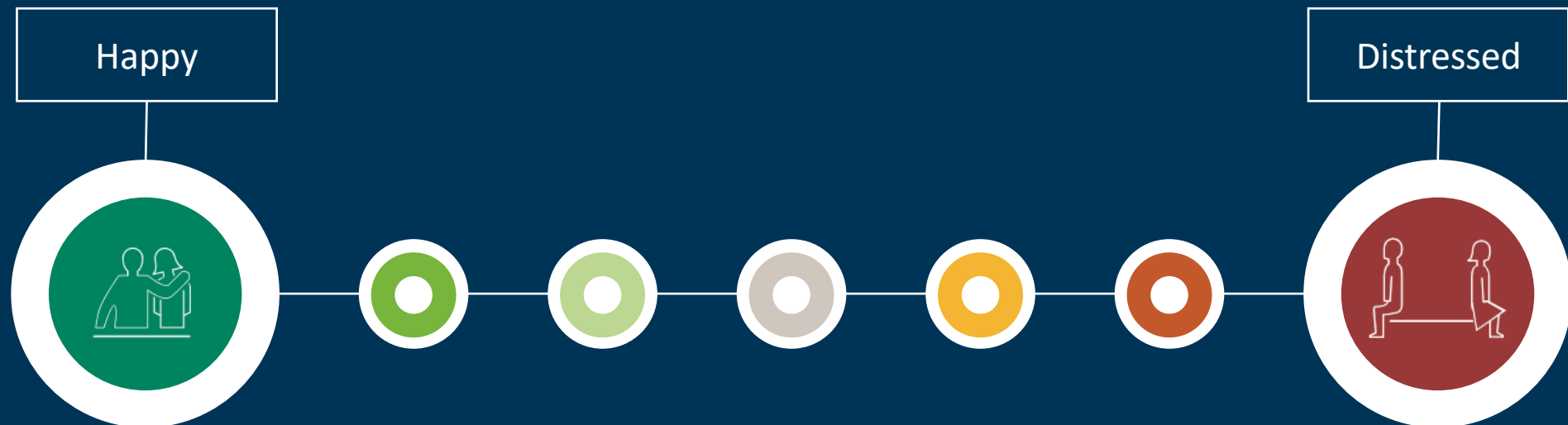
- ✓ Constructive or destructive
- ✓ Children in the middle role cards
- ✓ I statements



Relationship scale - how are we doing ?

How does each parent rate their situation on the scale from happy to distressed?

This can highlight differences in how they are experiencing their relationship



Relationship scale - how do we change this?

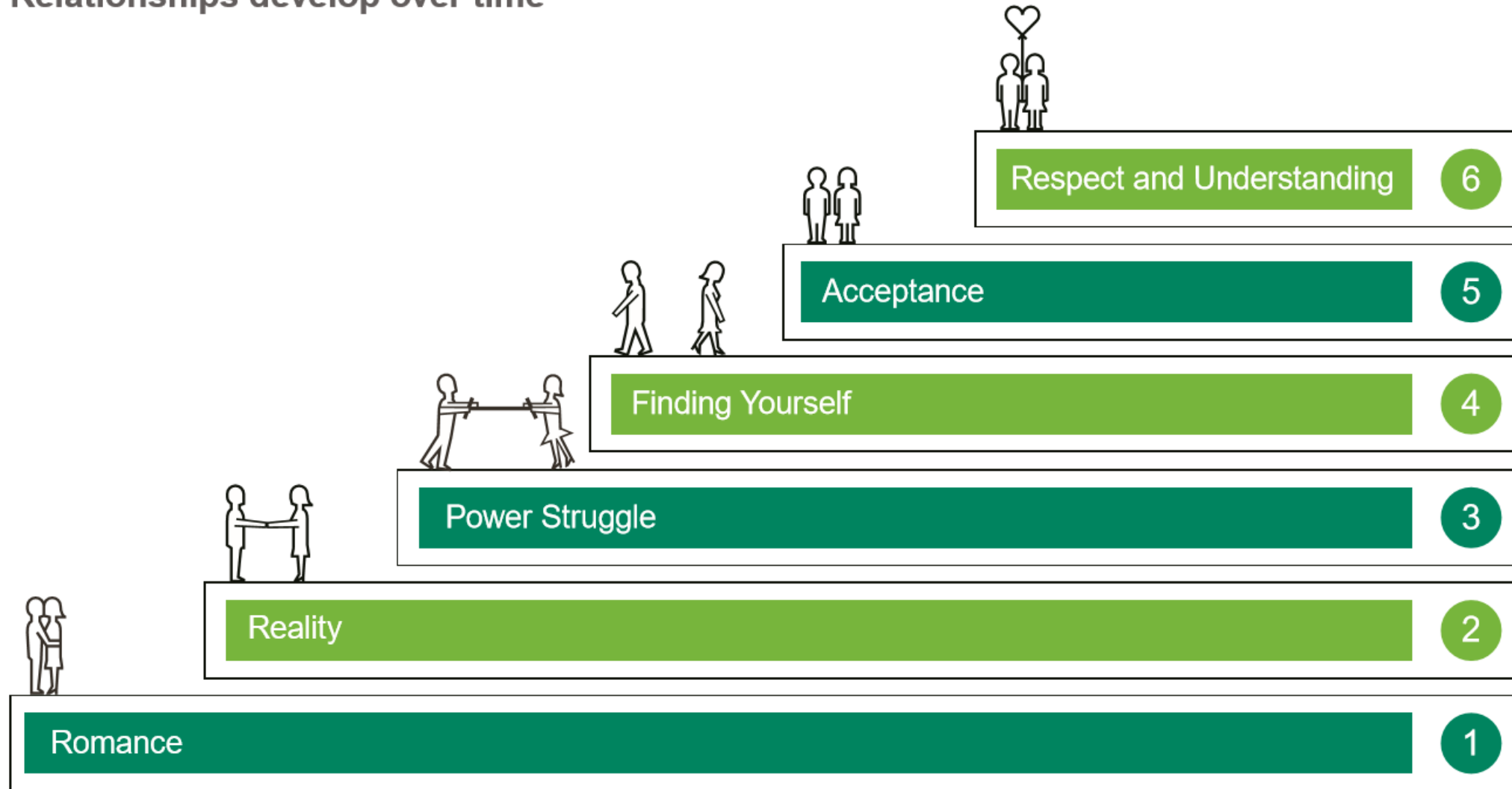


It can also be used to help parents think about where they are now and what they would like to be using solution focused questions:

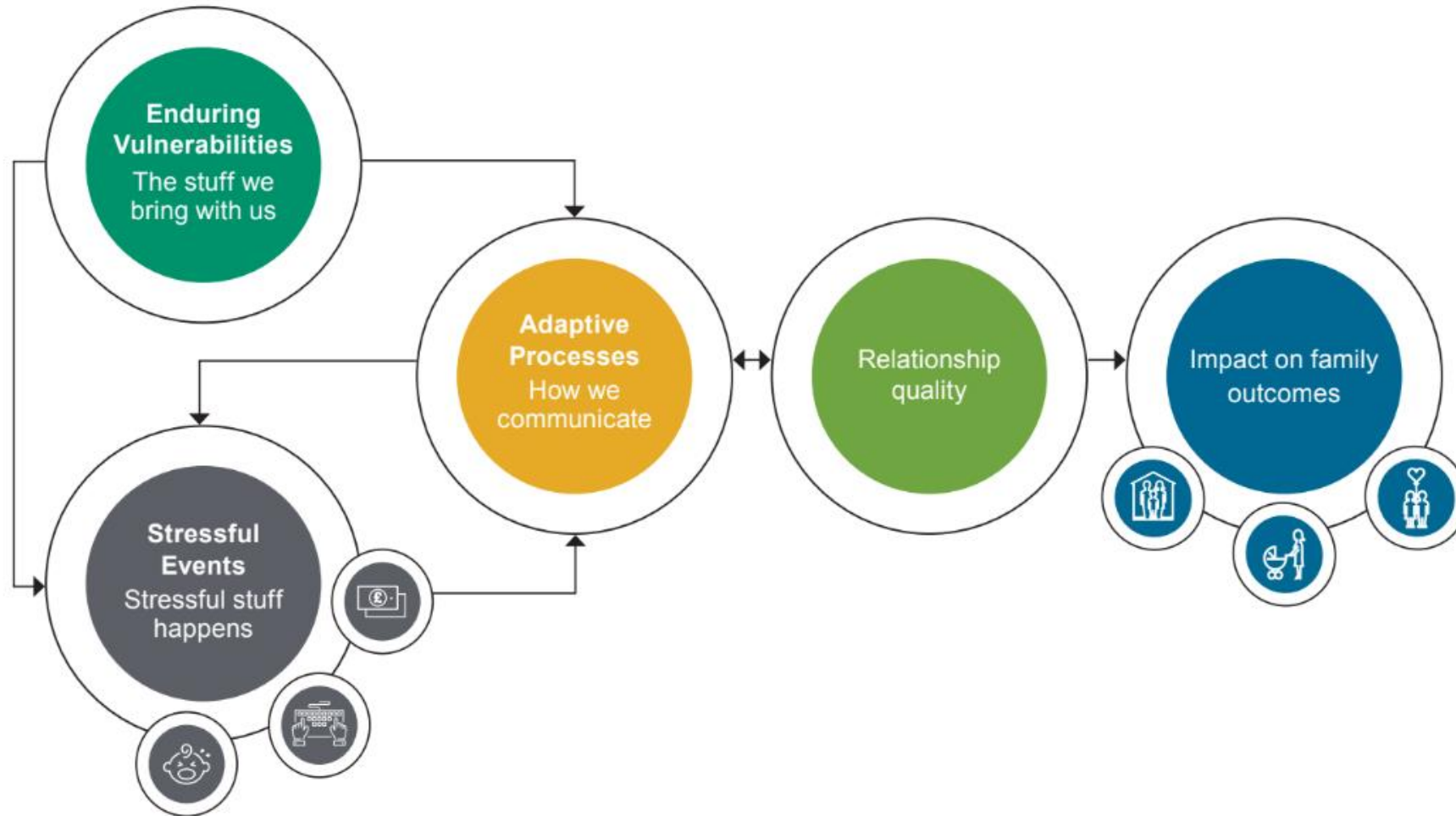
- How would things look, if it were better?
- What would be happening?
- What would have to change?
- What would you and your partner be doing differently?
- What would you be thinking or feeling?
- What might get in the way?
- When you have fallen out before, what helped you to make it up?

Stages of relationships

Relationships develop over time



Relationships (Vulnerability Stress Adaptation Model)



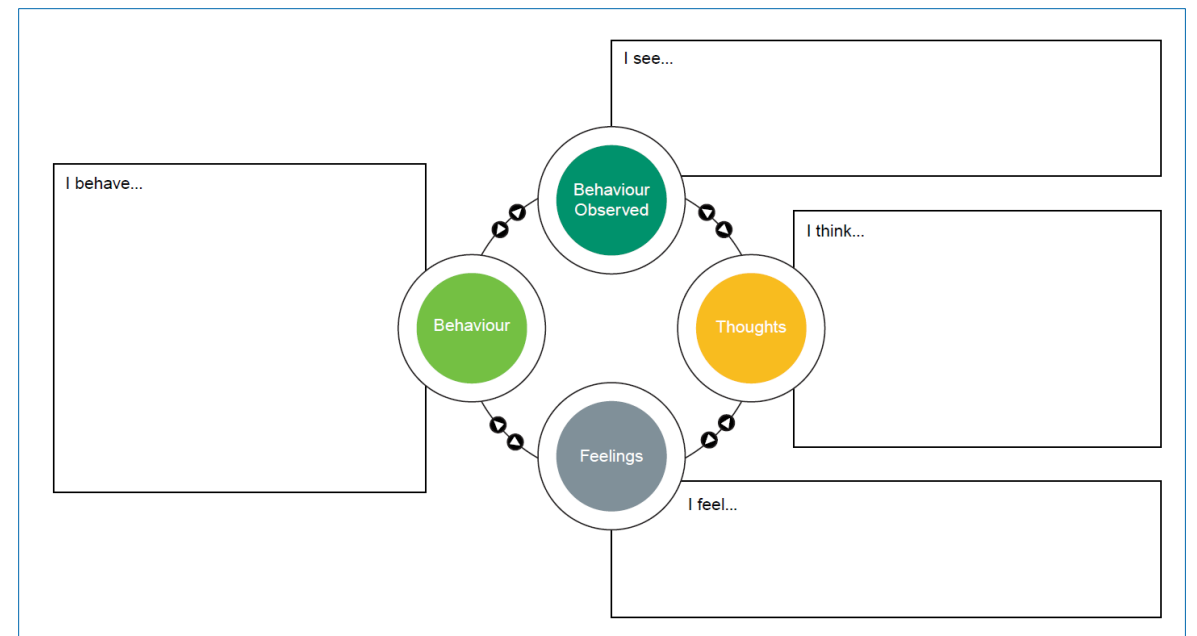
(Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model)

Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour Exercise

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 others behaviour.

When you ignore me when the football is on, I think this means you don't want to be around me, this makes me feel unloved, I slam doors in the kitchen to let you know I am not happy.



Our Typical Day

- A simple template to help family's identify what and when may be triggers to conflict in their relationship.
- Once identified you can work with the family to find alternative ways to behaviour that may not involve harmful conflict

Our typical day

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

Constructive vs Destructive

Parents in conflict may be struggling to identify the destructive elements of their behaviour

The constructive versus destructive cards, provide the opportunity to discuss behaviours with parents and if they are present in a relationship.

Ask the coupled to think about the behaviours and place them in the always sometimes never columns as they apply to their relationship

Then ask the couple/individual to identify what they would consider to be constructive and destructive behaviours

Using solution focussed questioning help them identify how they could change there destructive behaviour and increase the positive behaviours.

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

Explaining how the situation is making you feel

Asking each other's point of view

Using insults to make your point and share your feelings

In our relationship we...

Always

Sometimes

Never

You versus I Statements

You care more about work
than your own family

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

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

An **“I” message or “I” statement** is a style of communication that focuses on the feelings or beliefs of the speaker rather than thoughts and characteristics that the speaker attributes to the listener

Construct an **“I” statement** which takes the phrase from accusing to disclosing

At a basic level consider using the following framework to create I statements

I feel

Because

When.....

What I need.....

I feel anxious when.....

I need help with.....

I feel anxious when.....

Children in the Middle

- Research indicates that when parents put their children in the middle of their conflict then it can be harmful.
- Helping parents to identify the ways they might be doing this is an important first step in encouraging change.

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

The Mediator

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

The Judge

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

The Confidant

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

The Messenger

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

The Spy

Principles for working with parents

- Be curious, identify what is really going on
- Avoid making assumptions
- Don't take sides
- Keep the couple focused on the task in hand – parenting together.
- Be clear about how much time is available
- Stay away from “fix it” mode
- Encourage each partner to listen to the other
- If things get very heated, ask them to take time out.

! Refer/signpost sensitively to another agency if the conflict can't be resolved

! Remember you are not a couple counsellor but you can do a lot to help co-parents argue in ways that are not damaging to their children