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Guidance

Response to the statistical notice on plans to stop reporting the Parental Conflict Indicator as official statistics

Updated 24 August 2026

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Background

The Parental Conflict Indicator was one of nine indicators set out in [Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#) to track progress in tackling the disadvantages that affect

families and children's outcomes.

Since Improving Lives has been superseded, and the indicator has no statutory basis and is limited in its ability to track small changes in the prevalence of conflict across the general population, the department plans to stop reporting it regularly as official statistics. These plans were announced in a [Statistical Notice](#) on 11 May 2026.

Overview

A four-week consultation period allowed key stakeholders to respond with their views and comments on these plans. The consultation closed on 8 June 2026, having received seven responses:

- five from organisations working to improve outcomes for children and families experiencing separation and conflict, including relationship research and parenting charities and parent advocate groups
- two from Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Coordinators working in English local authorities

Responses received

The following summarises the main points made by respondents.

1. Messaging and the value of data

All respondents expressed concern about the signal that stopping regular reporting of the statistics would send, suggesting that it would reduce national visibility and accountability. One organisation made the point that reliable data was vital for understanding societal trends and informing effective policies and interventions that can make a real difference.

2. Improve and broaden measurement

Several organisations said that they thought the indicator should be improved rather than removed. One stakeholder recommended measuring separation-related conflict and another suggested strengthening the indicator set to better capture other wider risk factors for families including child wellbeing/outcomes, parental mental health and safeguarding risks. One stakeholder highlighted that measurement should be careful not to conflate parental conflict with domestic abuse.

3. Estimating the impact of RPC support

Some organisations stated that without robust ongoing data, policymakers, practitioners, and the public would lose the ability to track whether the support was making a difference.

4. Resource prioritisation

Some organisations highlighted that without regular reporting, it would become harder to understand national need and allocate resources appropriately

Outcome

Officials have decided to proceed with plans to stop regular reporting of the Parental Conflict Indicator as official statistics. However, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) remains committed to supporting families and reducing parental conflict.

1. Policy priorities

DWP has confirmed continued funding for the RPC programme in 2026 to 2027, including funding for all English local authorities to deliver relationship support as part of their Family Help offer. Funding decisions from April 2027 are pending, and

updates will be provided as soon as possible.

2. Improving conflict measurement

These statistics are based on the longitudinal [Understanding Society](#) study, which collects a wide range of household and family data. The study team regularly reviews survey design and content to keep questions clear, inclusive and relevant to modern families, whilst maintaining comparability over time.

Wave 15 (2023 to 2025) included changes on co-parenting and child maintenance, with findings from cognitive testing of questions on families available in an Understanding Society [Working Paper](#).

As a key partner and co-funding organisation, DWP will support this ongoing review and explore ways to measure parental conflict effectively alongside wider aspects of family life.

Understanding Society is not designed to measure domestic abuse. Adding explicit questions to distinguish domestic abuse from parental conflict in a longitudinal household panel would risk affecting participation, response rates and data reliability.

Estimates of the prevalence of domestic abuse in England and Wales are published regularly by the [Office for National Statistics](#).

3. Broadening the focus

Understanding Society is designed to investigate changing family life, generational stability and other influences on later life outcomes for parents and children. In doing so, it already collects information about each participant's physical and mental health throughout their lives.

These measures are regularly used by researchers, including reporting on adult and child wellbeing by the [Office for National Statistics](#) and the [Children's Society](#).

4. The value of reliable data and evidence

As set out in the statistical notice, Parental Conflict Indicator data are being collected in the 2026 to 2027 survey wave and will be available to researchers and stakeholders with other data in 2028.

Understanding Society data are securely stored by the [UK Data Service](#), with documentation available from the [Understanding Society website](#).

RPC is recognised in the transition to Families First Partnerships and the RPC programme remains engaged in cross-government work to support vulnerable families, including sharing evidence and best practice on parental conflict.

5. Estimating the impact of RPC and prioritising resources

DWP will support Understanding Society's review of parental conflict measurement, but no estimate of population prevalence, however precise, can be used to estimate the impacts of RPC support. The indicator statistics effectively tell us how many parents have experienced conflict over a given period.

In contrast, an impact assessment seeks to estimate how much difference an intervention makes to outcomes, compared with what would have happened anyway. For example, some parents can resolve their difficulties without intervention, whilst others may be in relationship distress due to external factors such as economic stress, which may ease over time.

Whilst these statistics can be used to estimate need and potential reach, they cannot, on their own, be used to estimate the impact of locally delivered relationship and co-parenting support.

The RPC programme encourages participating local authorities to monitor the experiences and outcomes of parents accessing their support. We recognise that RPC support varies from one area to another, and that strengthening local evaluation capability can support areas to assess the effectiveness of their RPC offer and inform decisions about future investment.

Parental Conflict Indicator data cannot show regional differences in the prevalence of conflict. Nationally, the proportion of children in couple-parent families with at least one parent reporting relationship distress has remained broadly stable for around a decade, so DWP remains committed to supporting parental relationships through RPC and wider family policies.

Summary

Continuing to monitor parental conflict data and trends, but not releasing official statistics, aligns with DWP's strategic approach to statistics and will allow analytical resources to be redirected towards higher priority statistics in line with the [DWP statistical work programme](#), delivering greater value for users.

For further information or queries, please contact: parentalconflict.statistics@dwp.gov.uk

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