

BriefEncounters®

Brief encounters® is training framed around a brief intervention model, enabling the practitioner working with families to provide valuable support when ‘turned to’.

Brief encounters® has been developed to equip frontline practitioners with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make timely and effective interventions with the families they encounter routinely. In the UK over 3,000 practitioners have been trained in Brief encounters®, with outreach to well over a million families, many in deprived circumstances and the vast majority in the early years of parenting. Here in Ireland, 300 practitioners have been trained with outreach to approximately 9,340 families.

The ‘turned to’ moment....

Trusted family practitioners or workers are usually ‘turned to’ when people experience problems at home. This presents an opportunity for the practitioner to make an early intervention by engaging with the client, assessing needs and supporting them in seeking their own solutions. When underlying relationship and family issues can be identified by practitioners early on in routine practice, there is lesser likelihood of problems escalating to crisis point.

Outcomes for Practitioners...

- effective engagement with parents
- recognise early signs of relationship stress/distress
- understand couple and family relationships better.
- use a brief intervention model across a wide range of family issues.
- use time skilfully within routine practice
- encourage self help and offer support
- make a relevant referral when necessary.
- be clear about personal and professional boundaries.
- develop their own supportive networks.

When 2,827 expectant parents and parents were polled by YouGov (27-29 May 2008) and asked what support they would want to be made more widely available to help parents who experience relationship pressures after the birth of a child, the largest category of parents, 53%, said more help from health visitors (Public Health Nurses.)

Aims and objectives of the course

Overall aim of the training course

The overall aim is to raise awareness of difficulties that couples/parents in contemporary families face and enable practitioners working with families to offer support and guidance to parenting couples whether together or separated, who are experiencing difficulties in their relationships. The purpose of the training is to encourage preventive interventions as part of routine care of couples and families.

We hope to achieve this by:

- Increasing understanding of how couple relationships work and the stages and changes through which they develop.
- Enhancing diagnostic sensitivity by raising awareness of ways in which relationship difficulties emerge.
- Increasing confidence to use listening skills within the time limits and constraints of busy, routine everyday work by offering an effective brief intervention model called **Brief encounters**®.
- Increasing understanding of the need for support in families where one parent is parenting alone or a step parent is involved.
- Increasing awareness of the part the helper's own personal experiences and attitudes play, particularly when responding to difficult family issues.

Course format

This is a 3-Day or 15 hour training course, generally arranged as an initial training day followed approximately two weeks later by the final 2 consecutive training days. This allows participants time to absorb the initial learning, to recognise opportunities to use the skills and information they have received and to gain practice and experience with the skills of the Brief encounters Framework. The break also allows them to 'gather' material for use in the following training sessions and for sharing experiences.

Two Trainers (Co –Trainers work with 12-16 participants and a number of different training methods are used throughout the 3 Day course. This is a lively, fast –moving course. Generally there is a short input on a topic of about 10-15 mins, followed by individual, pairs or group work. The experiential work may be used to explore the topic further or to internalise the learning by discussion, personal experience or practice, invariably the group returns to a plenary session before moving on. Attention is given to the different ways in which adults learn so the visual, auditory and experiential methods are used. There is a strong emphasis on diagrams and simple models and props to strengthen visual impact.

DAY 1 Learning outcomes

Aim – To explore Stage 1 of the Brief encounters® model and to raise an awareness of key times when parents might turn for help with their relationships.

- Demonstrate an understanding of life transitions when clients are likely to have relationship difficulties
- Understand family diversity and the impact on couple, parenting and family relationships
- Use basic listening and attending skills to be able to pick up signals from clients and respond to the ‘turned to’ moment
- Experience using Stage 1 from the three stage model that is known as *Brief encounters®*

DAY 2 Learning outcomes

Aim – To help make sense of relationships, so that you feel more confident exploring what is going wrong.

- Recognise relationship problems when they present in everyday work situations
- Use theoretical and evidence base to increase understanding of adult relationships, attachment, partner choice and relationship fit
- Use basic counselling skills to create a rapport and to help individuals move on and adapt to the development stages of relationships
- Experience using Stage 2 from the three stage model that is known as *Brief encounters®*

DAY 3 Learning outcomes

Aim – To explore how to make an ending for a Brief Encounter that is satisfactory and supportive for both the ‘client’ and the ‘helper’.

- Understand the relevance of the helper’s own personal experiences and attitudes during a Brief Encounter
- Understand how the Pinch-Crunch and Peer Support models can provide guidance and support for helpers
- Experience using the skills to create a good ending in order to complete Stage 2 and 3 of the *Brief encounters®* Model

Evaluation

An independent evaluation conducted by the University of Greenwich in 1998 showed that the **Brief encounters®** training has been a remarkable success”.

Six months after training:

- 94% of practitioners trained were using the model, with over half using it daily or weekly.
- 91% were more able to manage their involvement in their clients’ problems.
- 88% learned to manage their time more effectively.

In Ireland, an independent evaluation of the efficacy of the **Brief encounters®** programme was recently conducted by Veronica Bon, Regional Policy Worker of the South and Mid West Community Development Support Agency.

- 93 % of participants found that the **Brief encounters®** programme enhanced their understanding
- 89% (of multi-disciplinary groups) found the **Brief encounters®** programme was relevant to their practice
- 97% found the **Brief encounters®** programme useful overall.

Our recent pre- and post- evaluations of our 2010 courses have been analysed and have shown that there is a statistically significant increase in the following upon completion of the course:

1. Confidence in communicating with clients
2. Confidence in listening to clients who are distressed about their relationship
3. Confidence in providing information and helping clients engage with it
4. Readiness towards discussing relationship problems with clients

Quotes from Irish participants;

“The intervention framework will be very beneficial in my work and will be very beneficial in the area of time management” Social Worker

“I found this training excellent and would recommend it to colleagues”.
Public Health Nurse

“Course is excellent for the purpose it is aimed for &all areas covered are relevant. The 2 facilitators amongst the best I have seen”. Youth Worker

“I found all topics helpful particularly reflective listening skills - overall course encouraged my thinking and analysing skills”. Respite Coordinator (Enable Ireland).

“Essential intervention. Time constraints of short appointment times in General Practice. Increases confidence in effective closure/ door open/ follow up”. Practice Nurse

“I think this training is the way forward for Primary Care Team development.”
Practice Nurse Development Co-ordinator