

47 Tips for Professionals in Managing High Conflict Personalities

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Goals in working with high conflict personalities:

1. Reduce parental conflict
2. Promote healthy parent and child relationships
3. Help parents take greater personal responsibility
4. Staying child focused
5. Develop a conflict reduction plan

- 1 **Understand** what's '**driving**' the conflict (level of engagement)
- 2 High conflict personalities can be like a '**puzzle**': there are many pieces and you have to figure out how they fit together in understanding how you can help
- 3 **Understand** their social history: trauma and loss issues
- 4 "**Dig deeper**"...when details don't make sense
- 5 Generate other **hypotheses** for understanding the conflict and solutions. Collect data from multiple sources
- 6 **Recognize** when high risk situations impact on safety of all family members (i.e. lethality)
- 7 **Know** the '**red herrings**'
- 8 **Recognize** the '**noise**' from the relevant issues
- 9 **Treat** each parent **fairly** and **equally** (when working with couples)
- 10 Treat clients empathetically – **don't blame or shame them**
- 11 Chronic high conflict situations **are a form of PTSD**
- 12 **Maintain** the focus on the children
- 13 **Help** educate the client around the **impact of conflict on children**
- 14 **Develop** a 'pathway' forward vs. focusing on the past
- 15 **Understand** that conflict also impacts **EVERYONE** in the family
- 16 **Help** the client remain focused on resolving conflicts vs. being problem-focused. Teach problem solving skills
- 17 **Use** your skills to **remove obstacles** to conflict (external parties)
- 18 **Figure out** what people need vs. what they say they want
- 19 **Challenge** people's 'assumptions' when they claim these as facts
- 20 Who are the other people in this person's **network** that can be helpful vs. being an 'enabler'?
- 21 **Consider** all new information and review the plan if required particularly if your strategy is not working
- 22 Look for **inconsistencies** in terms of what people say and do
- 23 **Be aware** of conflicts of interest or role conflicts
- 24 **Don't** get drawn into the conflict
- 25 **Don't** personalize the conflict when clients or collaterals try to project their anger on you
- 26 **What can I learn** from these complex situations so that I can better manage future situations?
- 27 **Consult** with trusted colleagues or a supervisor when you get 'stuck'
- 28 **Recognize** your '**blind spots**' and manage them effectively
- 29 **Collaborate** with other professionals whenever
- 30 Set **limits on client misbehaviour**
- 31 High conflict personalities respond well and **need structure**
- 32 **Address and mitigate** power imbalances particularly if there is IPV
- 33 Don't be a **negative advocate** or enabler
- 34 **External control**: how can this family benefit from additional structure (i.e. Police; CAS; PC; restraining orders; courts)

- 35 **Listen 'between the facts'** i.e. tone, motives and implication of what they say
- 36 **Helping clients** navigate the emotional landscape that comes with separation/divorce
- 37 **Practice 'defensively'** to guard against you being the target of false allegations of professional misconduct
- 38 **Ensure** that all meetings with each person have an agenda where each parent has input into the content. For joint parental meetings this is particularly essential. Also ensure there are 'minutes' of each meeting
- 39 Often, HCP **require structure** to the conversation if they are presenting a lot of information. This prevents them from going off on numerous tangents and losing track of their message
- 40 **Manage** your own biases when you recognize them (i.e. not liking a particular person)
- 41 **Manage** other professionals who are 'bullies' and become hostile with you
- 42 **Know** when to close vs. keeping a case open
- 43 **Know** which cases 'not to take' at the onset of your work (i.e. where previous professional complaints have been made)
- 44 While working with you, it may be necessary to ensure that they have a good therapist!
- 45 **Ask** for feedback at the end of the work or at other strategic points such as; How have you found our working relationship? Have you been treated fairly and respectfully?
- 46 **Clarify** any lies or distorted information made by the client **right away**
- 47 **Don't be fearful** of these clients, despite their threats.

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