



From Conflict to Calm: Dealing with High Conflict Behaviour

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HIGH
CONFLICT
INSTITUTE

the missing peace

PLAN FOR THIS SESSION



The Brain in
Conflict



High Conflict
Personalities
(HCP)



TIPS – CARS
Method

The Rider and The Elephant

Logical Brain

- Conscious
- Rational
- Thinks in Words
- Low to medium stress

Emotional Brain

- Unconscious
- Processes Emotions
- Assesses Relationships and Threats
- Observes facial expression and tone
- High stress, danger, new situations
- Excitement, fight, flight, freeze, withdraw

2 Minutes on Attachment Theory

- ▶ Psychology Theory developed in the 1960s
- ▶ The importance of attachment to primary caregiver in early years of life (0-5yrs)
- ▶ Secure attachment also is key to emotional self-regulation.
- ▶ Secure or Insecure Attachment can affect Adult relationships and ability to regulate emotions in Adult life.

2 Brain Types of Conflict Resolution



PROBLEM-SOLVING

Slower; analyzes

Flexible thinking

Managed emotions

Moderate behaviours



DEFENSIVE

Fast; quick action

All-or-nothing thinking

Intense emotions

Personalization

Disclaimer



Not training you to diagnose personalities.

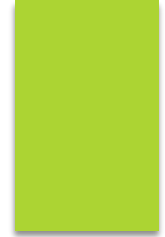


May be harmful to tell someone you believe they have a personality problem.



Just develop your Private Working Theory

The Continuum



Normal Range of
Response

High Conflict Personalities

*Effective Problem
Solving*

*Situational
Difficulties*

*High Conflict
Behaviours*

*Personality
Disorders*

- Rigid
- Unable to self reflect
- Blames others
- Cannot handle criticism
- Demands special treatment
- Creates ongoing drama
- Manipulative behaviors
- Frequent anger

- Narcissistic
- Borderline
- Histrionic
- Anti-social
- Paranoid

← Work long hours

← Hardship

← Divorce

← Job Loss

Pandemic?

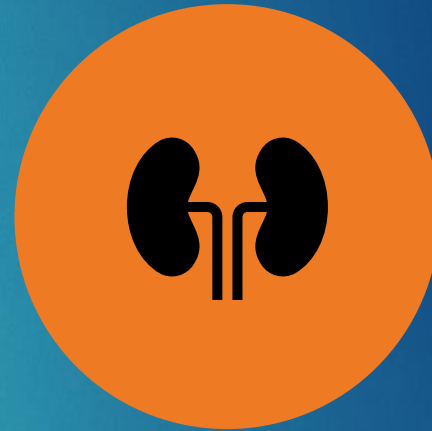
COMMON ISSUES of HCPs

- ▶ Rigid and Uncompromising
- ▶ Unable to Reflect on Behavior
- ▶ Blames Others
- ▶ Difficulty Accepting and Healing Loss
- ▶ Emotions Dominate Thinking (Can Hide This)
- ▶ Creates Ongoing Drama
- ▶ Avoids Responsibility

Breakout



HAVE YOU RUN INTO
THIS?



WHAT HAS BEEN THE
IMPACT?

4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

C.A.R.S. Method



CONNECTING with
E.A.R.



ANALYZING options and
dilemmas



RESPONDING to
misinformation



SETTING LIMITS on
behavior

Don't Get Hooked

- ▶ Watch for Defensive Thinking
- ▶ Lower your expectations
- ▶ You're not responsible for the outcome
- ▶ You are responsible for your professional standard of care
- ▶ Tone of voice - critical
 - ▶ Calm, confident, firm

Connecting Tips

- Human connection calms people down.
- Maintain a positive, problem-solving relationship.
- Focus on:
 - Being relaxed and respectful
 - What you respect about the person or their efforts
 - Demonstrating genuine care and concern for their well-being
 - The future instead of on the past
 - What you can do vs what you can't.

CONNECTING: Empathy, Attention & Respect

- You'll be frustrated by the HCP's emotional reactivity and distortions.
- It's easy to get "emotionally hooked," and to withhold any positive responses.
- It's easy to feel a powerful urge to attack or criticize.
- Instead, consciously use an E.A.R. Statement:
 - EMPATHY
 - ATTENTION
 - RESPECT

EAR Example

“Yardarm”

“I appreciate this complaint process is very stressful and upsetting. You need a mediator who is paying close attention to your concerns and really understands how difficult this has been. I will listen to your concerns today and I will do my best to assist you.”

E.A.R. Statements - Examples

- ▶ “I understand this is a frustrating situation”
- ▶ “Let’s see if we can solve this together”
- ▶ “I know this is important to you”
- ▶ “I respect your efforts on this”
- ▶ “I respect you feel strongly about this”
- ▶ “I’ll listen”

4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

C.A.R.S. Method



CONNECTING with E.A.R.



ANALYZING options and dilemmas

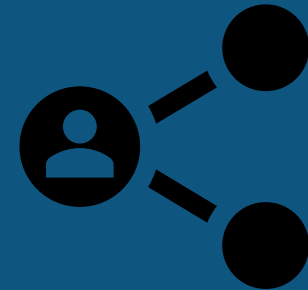


RESPONDING to misinformation



SETTING LIMITS on behavior

Focus on Choices



- ▶ Where there is strong emotion, don't worry about resolving the other person's emotional issues.
- ▶ Acknowledge their frustrations by using EAR.
- ▶ Then, focus the upset person on a choice:
 - ▶ On problem-solving
 - ▶ Away from emotions.
 - ▶ Makes them responsible
 - ▶ Gives them a sense of control.
- ▶ If they reject your options, ask them for a Proposal

Breakout

- ▶ What has been your biggest insight so far?
- ▶ Where could you use these skills or where have you already?
- ▶ What might be challenging?

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ANALYZING options and dilemmas



RESPONDING to misinformation



SETTING LIMITS on behavior

RESPONDING to Misinformation (Maintain a Healthy Skepticism)

- ▶ Be Skeptical - there may be many cognitive distortions.
- ▶ Tell them you will never know the full story. It is possible the extreme statements are true (**“You might be right!”**) and possibly not true.
- ▶ Next steps can still be taken, and decisions can still be made about the future.

Responding to Misinformation (Use B.I.F.F. Responses®)

**Brief
Informative
Friendly
Firm**

BIFF

BRIEF

B

2-5 sentences

- Avoid giving too many words for them to react to.
- Long responses open the door to more back-and-forth exchanges
- And trigger more upsets and blame

BIFF

INFORMATIVE



Stick to the facts

- Straight, useful information
- Avoid focusing on:
 - Opinions
 - Blame
 - Trying to give them insight about their attitude
- Use neutral terms

BIFF

FRIENDLY

F

Hard to do when you're
feeling attacked

- Friendly greeting; friendly close
- Give some empathy, attention or respect (EAR Statement)
- Relaxed tone

BIFF

FIRM

F

Resolve the issue and close the conversation peacefully

- Just end the hostile conversation.
- If needed, ask for a Yes or No response to a question, with a deadline date and time

HOSTILE EMAIL

Is this a hostile email?



Message:

Joe's email: "Jane, I can't believe you are so stupid as to think that I'm going to let you take the children to your boss' birthday party during my parenting time. Have you no memory of the last six conflicts we've had about my parenting time? Or are you having an affair with him? I always knew you would do anything to get ahead! In fact, I remember coming to your office party witnessing you making a total fool of yourself – including flirting with everyone from the CEO down to the mailroom kid! Are you high on something? Haven't you gotten your finances together enough to support yourself yet, without flinging yourself at every Tom, Dick and Harry? ..." [And on and on and on.]!

RESPONSE

Is this response BIFF?

IS IT?

- ☐ Brief
- ☐ Informative
- ☐ Friendly
- ☐ Firm

DOES IT CONTAIN?

- ☐ Advice
- ☐ Apologies
- ☐ Admonishments

Message:

Jane: “Thank you for responding to my request to take the children to my office party. Just to clarify, the party will be from 3-5 on Friday at the office and there will be approximately 30 people there – including several other parents bringing school-age children. There will be no alcohol, as it is a family-oriented firm and there will be family-oriented activities. I think it will be a good experience for them to see me at my workplace. Since you do not agree, then of course I will respect that and withdraw my request, as I recognize it is your parenting time.” [And that’s the end of her email.]

BIFF Exercise

Resources

1. Exercise #2 BIFF Response
2. BIFF Article



Each person write your BIFF Response.



Michael will describe how to coach a BIFF writer



In Pairs – coach each other on your BIFF Responses.



Large Group Debrief – 3-4 Volunteers to read out their BIFF Responses.

Human Resources

Email from Employee who was terminated to HR Manager

Hi Jerry,

I had another job interview this week. This is good, because my medical benefits are running out, thanks to you. You had no right to ruin my career and make it impossible for me to get a good letter of reference. Your corrupt company will be exposed sooner or later. By the way, I need a copy of that last list of job duties that I had. I have asked you for it three times, and you refuse to respond. Let me know if I need to drop by and pick it up.

Your old friend,

Roberta

Coaching for BIFF Responses: 10 Questions

Is it Brief?

Is it Informative?

Is it Friendly?

Is it Firm?

Does it contain
any Advice?

Does it contain
any
Admonishments?

Does it contain
any Apologies?

How do you think
the other person
will respond?

Is there anything
you would take
out, add or
change?

Would you like to
hear my thoughts
about it?

There's no “1 right way” to write a BIFF Response



It depends on:

- The BIFF writer
- The BIFF reader
- The Situation



Different responses are okay

Follow the BIFF format.



Always end by telling a BIFF writer: “*But it’s up to you!*”

Use B.I.F.F Responses



Brief: Keep it brief. 3-4 Sentences/

Informative: Focus on straight information, not arguments, opinions, or defending yourself

Friendly: Friendly Opening & Closing. Show Respect for their concerns.

Firm: Gently repeat information and close the door to further argument

See article: *Responding to Hostile Mail*

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CONNECTING with E.A.R.



ANALYZING options and dilemmas



RESPONDING to misinformation



SETTING LIMITS on behavior

SETTING LIMITS - Indirect Confrontations

- ▶ We are tempted to confront them.
- ▶ AVOID:
 - ▶ challenging the person
 - ▶ attacking their defenses
 - ▶ attacking your relationship

Indirect Confrontations

Focus on rules and perceptions
external to your relationship

- ▶ “The collective agreement requires...”
- ▶ “It is our policy to...”
- ▶ “The arbitrator relies on evidence, this means...”
- ▶ “Someone else might misunderstand that action...”

4. SETTING LIMITS (Educate About Consequences)

- ▶ HCPs do not connect realistic CONSEQUENCES to their own ACTIONS, especially fear-based actions.
- ▶ They feel like they are in a fight for survival, which blinds them to realities.
- ▶ Their life experiences may have taught them different consequences than most.
- ▶ They can be educated by a caring person.
- ▶ Assertively set expectations early while focusing on the future,

Summary of Key HCP Skills

- ▶ **CONNECTING:** Respond with Empathy, Attention and/or Respect (E.A.R.)
- ▶ **ANALYZING OPTIONS:** Focus them on Choices and Options
- ▶ **RESPONDING:** Use BIFF Responses (**B**e **B**rief, **I**nformative, **F**riendly and **F**irm)
- ▶ **SETTING LIMITS:** Don't make it personal. Use policies, procedures, rules and regulations.

QUESTIONS?



Helpful Books

- ▶ HCPs behavior is mostly unconscious
- ▶ HCPs want relief from their constant distress
- ▶ HCPs push professional boundaries out of desperation, not out of intent to be difficult
- ▶ Direct confrontation brings resistance and escalation of blame, not insight for HCPs
- ▶ Most HCPs have problem-solving skills, which you can access if you calm their emotions
- ▶ Many HCPs can be helped

Closing Points about HCPs