



Practical Skills for Dealing with High Conflict People

Nov. 5, 2016
SCMA Conference

Presented by
Shawn D. Skillin, Esq.

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THEY MAY HAVE PERSONALITY DISORDERS

- Enduring Pattern of Behavior
- From Early Childhood/Adolescence
- Extreme Thinking
- Extreme Emotions
- Extreme Behavior
- Interpersonal Dysfunction
- Impulse Control Problems
- Outside of cultural norms



Core Issues of PDs:

#1: LACK OF SELF-AWARENESS

People with personality disorders lack awareness of:

- Why they are the way they are
- How they contribute to own problems
- How to change

-- Aaron Beck (1990)

Cognitive Therapy of Personality Disorders

- Why they feel upset right now
- How they affect other people
- What skills they have that *do work*

So they don't gain insights from feedback.



**Core Issues of PDs:
#2: LACK OF CHANGE**

When person loses “flexible adaptation” & takes a “non-reflective stance” in social interactions:

1. Behavior becomes rigidly patterned
2. This causes significant social impairment
3. Which causes significant internal distress
4. This rigid behavior “evokes” responses in others which “validate” their inflexible beliefs

-- Efrain Bleiberg (2001) *Treating Personality Disorders in Children and Adolescents*



**Core Issues of PDs:
#2: LACK OF CHANGE**

So we often need do opposite of what’s evoked in us.

Resist fight or flight urges.

Resist disliking a party or being charmed too easily.



**Core Issues of PDs:
#3: Blaming Others**

The **High Conflict Personalities (HCPs)** externalize by focusing on a specific person or group – their **Target of Blame**

This leads them into intense conflict and a drive to control or eliminate the Target of Blame:

He’s the cause of all of my problems. If I can totally eliminate him from my life, everything will be fine.”

“I had to hit her, after what she said to me.”

 **5 “High-Conflict” Personality Disorders**

- “I’m Very Superior” (Narcissistic) Personalities
Demanding and demeaning, self-absorbed
- “Love you, Hate you” (Borderline) Personalities
Overly friendly, then angry, sudden mood swings
- “You’ll Betray Me” (Paranoid) Personalities
Suspicious, expects conspiracies, counter-attacks first
- “Con Artists” (Antisocial) Personalities
Breaks rules & laws, deceptive, enjoys hurting others
- “Always Dramatic” (Histrionic) Personalities
Superficial, helpless, exaggerates, center of attention

 **Gender of Personality Disorders**

Narcissistic =
__% Male to __ % Female

Borderline =
__% Male to __ % Female

Paranoid =
__% Male to __ % Female

Antisocial =
__% Male to __ % Female

Histrionic =
__% Male to __ % Female

 **Gender of Personality Disorders**

Narcissistic =
62% Male to 38 % Female

Borderline =
47% Male to 53 % Female

Paranoid =
43% Male to 57% Female

Antisocial =
74% Male to 26% Female

Histrionic =
51% Male to 49% Female

 **Disclaimer**

- This seminar does not train you to diagnose personality disorders.
- It may be harmful to tell someone that you believe that they have a personality disorder.
- Just recognize potential patterns and adapt your approach accordingly.
- Just develop a Private Working Theory

 **2 Hemispheres of Brain (approx.)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Left Hemisphere</u>• “Logical Brain”• Generally Conscious• Language• Thinks in words• Planning• Examines Details• Rational analysis• Systematic Solutions• Positive Emotions Calm, contentment, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Right Hemisphere</u>• “Relationship Brain”• Generally Unconscious• Observes relationships• Thinks in pictures• Creativity, Art, Intuition• Non-verbal Skills• Facial recognition & cues• Gut feelings• Negative Emotions Hurt, anger, fear, etc.
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 **Corpus Callosum**

- The “bridge” wiring between the hemispheres.
- Aids in the flow of information back and forth. More flow is better.
- It’s smaller in repeatedly abused children.
- It’s smaller in adults with borderline personality disorder (possibly the result of abuse in childhood).
- Some people get stuck in rt. brain upset emotions; can’t access their left brain problem-solving skills.



Talking to the Right Brain

- Tone of voice and body language is amazingly important: Calm, confident, firm
- Avoid logical arguments in times of stress
- Avoid giving Negative Feedback (about the whole person, focusing on the past, negative tone of voice)
- Avoid threats: these escalate the HCP
- Don't say they have a personality disorder



2 Types of Conflict Resolution

<p>PROBLEM-SOLVING BRAIN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slower; takes time to analyze problems • Flexible thinking (many solutions to every problem) • Managed emotions • Moderate behaviors (so can maintain relationship) 	<p>DEFENSIVE BRAIN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast; shuts down higher thinking & problem-solving to focus on quick action • All-or-nothing thinking (eliminate or escape the enemy) • Intense emotions drive fight or flight behavior • Extreme behaviors (to defend self from life or death dangers or <i>perceived</i> life or death dangers)
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Your Role as a Mediator: A Very Ethical Role

1. CONNECT with respect (Empathy, Attention and Respect throughout the process)
2. STRUCTURE a client-centered process from the start. Teach them to: *Focus on the future by making proposals and making agreements*
3. EDUCATE them about their choices and possible consequences of each choice

 **CONNECTING with
Empathy, Attention & Respect**

You'll be frustrated by the HCP's emotional reactivity and thinking 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 your E.A.R.:

- EMPATHY
- ATTENTION
- RESPECT

See article: *Calming Upset People with E.A.R.*

 **E.A.R. Statement**

- Example: "I can **understand** your frustration – this is a very important decision in your life. Don't worry, I will pay full **attention** to your concerns about this issue and any proposals you want to make. I have a lot of **respect** for your commitment to solving this problem, and I look forward to solving it too.

 **Fears and EARs for HCPs**

<u>Their Fear</u>	<u>Your EAR Response</u>
• Being abandoned	• I want to help you
• Being seen as inferior	• I respect your efforts
• Being ignored	• I'll pay attention
• Being dominated	• I'll listen
• Being taken advantage of	• Its just rules we all have to follow
	• I understand this can be frustrating
	• I'll work with you on this
	• I know this can be confusing

 **Cautions about E.A.R.**

- Avoid believing or agreeing with content.
- Avoid volunteering to “fix it” for them (in an effort to calm down their emotions).
- Be honest about empathy and respect (find something you truly believe)
- Keep an arms-length relationship.
- You don’t have to listen forever.
- You don’t have to use words or these words.

 **Setting Limits with Empathy, Attention & Respect**

- HCPs need limits because they can’t stop themselves
- With HCPs, focus on giving them E.A.R. statements and **external reasons** for new behavior (rather than focusing on negative feedback about past behavior):
- “Our policies require us to ...”
- “The law requires me to ...”
- “It might appear better to _____ if you...”
- “I understand, but someone else might misunderstand your intentions with that action...”
- “Let’s take the high road...”
- “Choose your battles...”

 **Setting Limits with EAR**

- 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 someone who shows them Empathy, Attention & Respect.



3-Steps for Making Proposals

- 1. Propose:** WHO will do WHAT, WHEN and WHERE.
- 2. Ask questions:** The other person then asks questions about the proposal, such as: "What's your picture of what this would look like, if I agreed to do it?" "What to you see me doing in more detail?" "When would we start doing that, in your proposal?"
- 3. Respond:** Other person then responds with: "Yes." "No." Or: "I'll think about it."
And if you say "No," then you make a new proposal.



Avoid "Why" Questions

Why turns into a criticism of the other person's proposal.

Why triggers defensiveness which makes it hard for them to think of solutions to problems.

"*Why* did you say that?" usually means "I think that's a stupid idea and I want to force you to admit it." Instead, just make another proposal – until you can both agree on something.



Responding with BIFF Response™

Brief: Keep it brief. Long explanations and arguments trigger upsets.

Informative: Focus on straight information, not arguments, reactions, emotions or defending yourself (you don't need to)

Friendly: Say thank you for writing and/or a friendly closing (have a nice weekend) and/or you respect their efforts (E.A.R.)

Firm: Calmly close the door to further argument or give two choices and ask for response date

See Handout: *BIFF Article*



**Coaching for BIFF Responses:
10 Questions**

1. Is it Brief?
2. Is it Informative?
3. Is it Friendly?
4. Is it Firm?
5. Does it contain any Advice?
6. Does it contain any Admonishments?
7. Does it contain any Apologies?
8. How do you think the other person will respond?
9. Is there anything you would take out, add or change?
10. Would you like to hear my thoughts about it?



**Summary:
Your Role as a Mediator**

1. CONNECT with Empathy, Attention and Respect throughout the process
2. STRUCTURE the dispute resolution process from the start. Teach them to: *Focus on the future by making proposals and making agreements*
3. EDUCATE them about their choices and possible consequences of each choice



THANK YOU !

Learn More:
www.highconflictistitute.com
info@highconflictistitute.com
