

DISENGAGE. Decide. Deliver.

Insight to help disengage from a high conflict personality.

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The ability to disengage from the conflict you are experiencing will play a key role in the level of stress, anxiety and anguish you will experience while trying to parent with someone with whom you are in

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Disengaging from the parental conflict will be one of the most difficult challenges you will ever have to overcome.

However, if you take the time to sort through your emotional triggers and plan a strategy for how to cope when triggered, you will be putting yourself, and your children, on a path for healthy conflict resolution.

You are in conflict with your child's other parent because their words and actions negatively affect both you and your children. And, like most parents, you will do anything to protect your children from harm – verbal, physical, or emotional.

As a high conflict separation and divorce mediator for over 12 years, I have all the tools necessary to resolve

the most difficult of scenarios. Yet I wasn't able to apply my skills to my own life.

For 8 years I struggled with a *high conflict relationship* within my family circle. For 8 years I berated myself for having the ability to resolve almost any conflict between other people, yet couldn't figure out how to resolve my own. For 8 years I lived the conflict, escalation, guilt and confusion cycle, unsure of how to end it.

It wasn't until the person I was in conflict with moved away from our home that I was able to begin the disengagement process, and begin to understand how I was being emotionally triggered on a daily basis, hindering my ability to manage the relationship.

After 8 years of high conflict behaviors, my creative coping skills had been depleted.

While I was still able to help others resolve their conflict, I wasn't able to resolve my own; I was too emotionally engaged in the outcome.

Fast-forward 6 months. That's how long it took for me to disengage from the high conflict relationship and feel like I was slowly regaining control of my high conflict situation.

6 months of working through some tough questions.

6 months of actively seeking out my emotional triggers.

6 months of creating and implementing boundaries to protect myself.

6 months of developing coping mechanisms for when I was emotionally triggered.

And while those were a challenging 6 months – full of introspection, confusion, anger, anxiety and exhaustion – I can honestly say that I am now 95% emotionally disengaged from the high conflict relationship I was in.

Roughly once a year, I let my guard down and forget the strategies I have put into place to ensure I stay disengaged from the conflict. But what's important is that I don't let it derail me for longer than a week. I have strategies in place that allow me to quickly regroup and refocus on my purpose for staying disengaged.

It is vitally important to understand what your emotional triggers are before you can begin the disengagement process. How can you disengage from something if you don't know what got you engaged in the first place? Without that base understanding, you will continue to be triggered without even knowing you are being triggered.

Your #1 goal right now is to create emotional disengagement from the high conflict parent so that you are better able to manage yourself and help your children through their separation/divorce challenges.



Your #1 goal right now is to create emotional disengagement from the parent you are in conflict with so that you are better able to manage yourself and help your children through their separation / divorce challenges.



Who Are High Conflict People Disclaimer:

- Bill Eddy, with the High Conflict Institute, has developed a working theory and definition of High Conflict People. It is not a personality disorder and it is not in the DSM.
- I am not a Doctor. I am not telling you your co-parent has a High Conflict Personality
- You are not a Doctor. Or maybe you are, but not one who has been hired to diagnose the other parent.
- Do not attempt to diagnose the other parent with a High Conflict Personality
- Do not tell the other parent you think they have a High Conflict Personality
- The information provided in this document is to give you insight as to how High Conflict Personalities see the world, to help you better understand why your co-parent reacts the way they do so you can learn how best to communicate with them.



The Importance of DISENGAGING

A magic wand can't be waved to have your emotional triggers instantly disappear. Nor will Harry Potter arrive and cast a spell on your co-parent making him/her suddenly rational. High Conflict Personalities DO NOT CHANGE.

Part of what makes people a High Conflict Personality is that they have narcissistic tendencies. Narcissists believe they are always right. And they will spin every conversation, every email, every experience they have to meet their need to be right in their heads.

The High Conflict Personality lens is always the same; they are right and you are wrong.

JUST because they believe they are right and you are wrong, just because they say it, just because they try to convince the world of it – DOESN'T MAKE IT TRUE.

Parents who are the non-high conflict parent often spend countless hours/days/months/years trying to figure out how to make the parenting relationship better. Surely there is a book or a course that can help you determine how to deal with someone who is so irrational? If you could just figure out how to get through to the other parent, to help them understand your point of view, to encourage them to see how the conflict between you two is hurting the children?

NOTHING YOU SAY OR DO WILL CHANGE THE OTHER PARENT'S BEHAVIOR.

Dr. Phil says it best: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." And you've long heard about the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Was the other parent the perfect parent while you were together? No. That's one of the reasons you aren't together anymore. So why are you expecting the behavior to change now that you're apart? You know the other parent isn't going to change, EVER. You can't depend on them to help change the direction of the conflict.

YOU CAN ONLY CHANGE HOW YOU RESPOND TO THE CONFLICT

You can't change what you don't know. Understanding your emotional triggers allows you to figure out why you keep engaging in conflict cycle with your co-parent.

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to see or hear it, does it still make a noise? The same is true for conflict. If you don't engage in the conflict the other parent stirs up, is there still conflict?

Figuring out your triggers and having a plan for when you are triggered will help you move towards disengagement. Or as I like to call it: *FREEDOM*.

Once you are disengaged, or in "freedom", his/her words won't sting any more, the control he/she once had over your life will disappear, you won't expect him/her to change and won't be surprised by attacks on you personally, or as a parent.

Wouldn't it be nice to have the kind of relationship with your children's other parent that other people have? You have coffee together to plan the summer schedule; you attend birthday parties, parent teacher interviews and Christmas concerts together.

It's a beautiful ideal – one to strive towards for sure.

BUT YOU CAN'T GET THERE ALONE

You are separated/divorced from a High Conflict Personality. You are separated/divorced from one of the most challenging personalities there is to co-parent with.

You may never have that pretty white picket fence separation/divorce. You need to let go of that expectation and live in the present. The white picket fence separation/divorce idealism is *UN*likely. You and your co-parent will never be friends. But you don't need to be friends.



Your goal is to move towards a Business Professional Relationship.



Imagine you are two CEOs of a company with nothing in common but the mutual desire to build a Fortune 500 successful company; two CEOs of a company with very different views on how to build that successful company; two CEOs of a company who have to figure out how to communicate with each other to ENSURE that company is successful.

That successful company is *your children*.

And one of the CEOs has a High Conflict Personality, which means he/she thinks his/her way is ALWAYS right and your way is ALWAYS wrong.

Fighting CEOs result in a failed company.

You are the only CEO who can ensure the conflict between you two remains minimal.

The other CEO is a High Conflict Personality, doesn't know he/she is a High Conflict Personality and will do his/her best to provoke you to create more drama and conflict. The other CEO doesn't understand what he/she's doing to destroy the company. The other CEO genuinely believes his/her way is the RIGHT way to success.

But you know better.

You know reduced drama and reduced conflict is the only way to grow a successful Fortune 500 company.

It isn't fair that one CEO has to do all the work, but nothing in business is fair.

So you do the work. You figure out your triggers. You figure out how to disengage from the drama and conflict the other CEO creates. You calmly and purposefully respond to challenges in your path of creating a successful company.

CALMLY AND PURPOSEFULLY RESPOND.

More on this later – right now we need to get you disengaged!

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Calmly and purposefully respond.



The NEED to PLEASE

Do you ever lay awake at night wondering how the heck you got into this mess in the first place? You are an intelligent, likeable human being. How did you end up with someone who has a High Conflict Personality? And what made you think having kids with them was a good idea?

You aren't alone.

Virtually everyone who IS NOT a High Conflict Personality has been there and thought that. And almost no one has figured out why they ended up in a relationship with someone who emotionally, mentally, financially and sometimes physically dragged them through the dirt. Often times they even repeat the cycle and end up with a 2nd or 3rd High Conflict Personality. The need to please is deep-rooted and was nurtured long before you met the person you had children with.

Most people would say they aren't pleasers; that they are strong and independent. How do they explain having children with someone who isn't capable of allowing someone to be strong and independent?

From a very young age people learn that when you please someone, they smile. When you don't please someone, they are indifferent towards you. Voila, the need to please is created. Often, pleasers go through life trying to please others and often don't even know that is what they are trying to do. Pleasing someone creates an adrenaline high, and validation that we are **good enough**.

Along the way, pleasing someone became the only way you received validation that you were *good enough*.

As a result you sought out people to please – parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, employers and spouses. And spouses....

When you first met your High Conflict Personality former spouse, you were attracted to the energy, the flair for drama, the ability to take control of a situation, the ability to sing your praises really loudly when you pleased him/her...the ability to sing your praises really loudly when you pleased him/her...Which only fuelled your need to please.

WOW... this person who seems to have so much charismatic energy thinks I'm awesome.

WOW, when I please him/her, he/she builds me up to be bigger than life.

WOW, with him/her in my life, I am **good enough**.

WOW, I better not screw this up.

WOW, it's getting harder and harder to please him/her.

WOW, if I can't please him/her, I must not be **good enough** anymore.

WOW, how did I end up here in this place of control and abuse?

WOW, I need out of this relationship.

BUT WOW, I still need to raise children with him/her.

BUT WOW, I need to make this parenting relationship better for my kids.

BUT WOW, I need to please/him her and then it will all be OK.

BEING GOOD ENOUGH DOES NOT DEPEND ON THE OTHER PARENT'S VALIDATION

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Write that down and put it on your mirror in the bathroom, put it on your computer screen at work, tuck it into your wallet, make a recording of it for your alarm clock.

You will never be able to please the other parent. Nothing you say or do will change their feelings towards you. You will *never* be **good enough** through their High Conflict Personality lenses.

STOP TRYING. And start doing something productive.



Learn to understand your subconscious need to please the other parent; it is subconscious, consciously you despise/fear him/her.

If you have any feelings towards the other parent, it's a sign you aren't disengaged. Understanding your need to please will help you better understand your emotional triggers and allow you to fully disengage from the control the other parent has over whether or not you are **good enough**.

And what happens when you are emotionally disengaged from your co-parent? When you become **good enough** on your own terms?

Your Fortune 500 Company begins to thrive. Your Company begins to model the calm and purposeful actions of its leader. It only takes one leader to make a difference. And if the other CEO (parent) isn't capable, you need to step up to the plate.



Disengagement DISCLAIMER

I am not suggesting that because the other parent may have a High Conflict Personality that they can't parent; they can. They likely won't parent the way you would like them to parent, but chances are 100% that they don't think you are parenting the right way either.

Remember, High Conflict Personalities think they are always right and you are always wrong. Just because you parent differently, doesn't make it wrong parenting. Instead of focusing on the negatives of different parenting styles, look for the positive.

- Your children will have experience adapting to change (a fabulous asset when they are become adults)
- Exposure to different parenting styles allows your children to make well rounded choices should they choose to become parents
- Parents with different belief systems or faith practices raise children who are curious about the world around them

Children's safety is paramount. It trumps everything. And I am not referring to fake safety (they went to school in dirty clothes, the kids had Alpha-Getti for lunch 3 days in a row, they stayed up till 11pm to watch the fireworks and are tired, mom/dad's new date is a ditz). I'm talking about real safety. If you have real safety concerns that your children are in real danger while with the other parent, it is your responsibility to contact Children's Services or the Police.

There is no easy way to disengage (unless you want to hire someone to take over ALL communication with the other parent). You have to do the work. You have to dig deep. You have to WANT to disengage. Often we say we want the conflict over, but still act in a way that contributes to the conflict continuing.

If you genuinely WANT to disengage from the conflict you are experiencing with your co-parent, the following questions will help you with the process.



Steps and Strategies for DISENGAGEMENT

- 1) What scares you most about the other parent's behavior?** Defining specifically what you are afraid of helps you to then understand WHY.
- 2) Why do their threats hold so much power?** Often we **what if** the threats in a negative sense; reframe the threats to consider the reality. What would really happen if he/she took you to court? What would really happen if....
- 3) What language does the other parent use that presses your buttons?** Certain words affect us more than others. What words does the other parent use that triggers you? Once you know what they are, you can plan for how to respond when you hear them.
- 4) What emotion does the other parent hope to spark in you when he/she presses your buttons? Anger? Anxiety? Fear?** If you don't know what emotion you are feeling when your buttons are pressed, you aren't going to know which emotion you need to work through.
- 5) What tone does the other parent use that you interpret as hostile?** Condescending is a common one. If your co-parent's condescending tone is pressing your buttons, you are caring too much about what they think of you.
- 6) What drives your need to defend yourself against the other parents attacks?** It's natural in nature to defend yourself when you're attacked. The purpose of defending yourself in nature is protect yourself from death. The other parent isn't going to eat you for dinner and they aren't going to stop attacking your character or your parenting, regardless of how you defend yourself.
- 7) Why do your co-parent 's lies cause you to get angry?** Everyone close to you knows the other parent is a liar. Your children may not know it yet (AND DO NOT TELL THEM) but one day they will be adults and reflect on their childhood, and then they will know too.

- 8) What if all the other parent's criticisms of you and your ability to parent were true, what would you do differently?** Think hard on this. If you wouldn't do anything differently, why are you letting their words make you feel the need to defend yourself? **Is your parenting good enough just the way it is?** Sometimes there is some truth to what the other parent says about our parenting skills and us. If you are 100% confident that your parenting is **good enough** then stop listening to the words telling you it isn't.
- 9) Why do you keep expecting your co-parent to behave differently?** People don't change overnight, they are who they were while you were together. And they didn't change while you were together, so why would they change now?
- 10) What would it feel like to get an email/phone call from the other parent and have them say horrible, manipulative things to you and not FEEL anything? NO anger. NO need to defend yourself. NO anxiety that what they are saying might be true.** You've lived in anger/fear for a very long time, it's all you've known for as long as you can remember. You need to start feeling how it feels to not engage in conflict so you know what feeling you're working towards.
- 11) What's stopping you from disengaging in the conflict you are experiencing with the other parent?** There is a reason you haven't disengaged yet, what is it? Sometimes what we know is comfortable, so we hang out there, even though it's toxic.
- 12) When are you triggered? Daily? Hourly? Weekly?** Understanding when you are triggered allows you to figure out which boundaries you need to create around the timing of your communication with the other parent. Do they text you 10 times a day? Call you with ridiculous requests? Email you novels critiquing your parenting weekly? A communication plan is key, but you need to understand your needs before you make one.
- 13) What if you responded to emails every 72 hours (or once a week) instead of immediately? What's the worst that could happen? Would you be taken to court?** If you put a boundary in place that all communication will be responded to within 72 hours (and tell the other parent about the boundary and follow through on it), it's highly unlikely that a Judge would slap your wrists.



14)Your co-parent has a High Conflict Personality, which means they gain power and momentum from drama and conflict. What would happen if you stopped reacting? Stopped fuelling their need for drama and conflict? Changing the dance you're used to is scary for both of you. Planning out what to expect from the other parent, and yourself, as you begin this process will help you stay on the path of disengagement when it gets tough. Your old dance is easy, the new one is going to take some time learning the new steps.

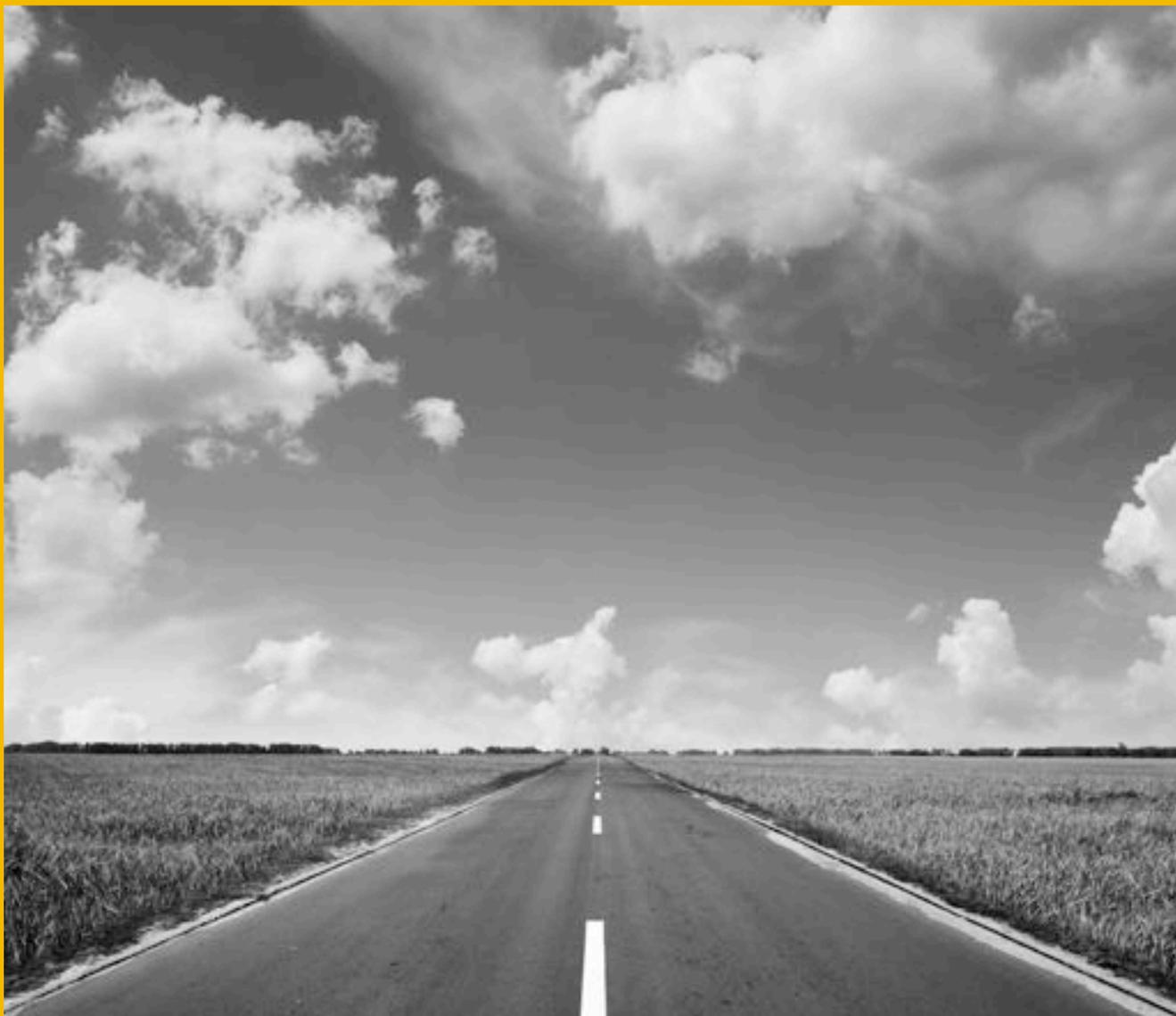
15)What boundaries can you put in place to protect yourself from becoming triggered? If emails trigger you, have a friend or professional read them and tell you how to respond. If seeing him/her during child exchanges presses your buttons, create a new model for exchanges.

16)What do you say or do that triggers the other parent? It may seem like all you have to do is breath and they get angry but chances are if you look a little deeper, they too have triggers. Once you know what they are, you can avoid them. (Or press them, if you really feel like continuing to fight)

17)Knowing only you can change the conflict cycle, that the other parent will never change, what can you do differently in your communication? They write you novels for emails, but if you do the same, do they read them?

18)What behaviors do you want to model for your children? How do you want them to resolve conflict when they are adults? Children learn what they live. What do you want them to learn?

19)What would your life look like in 10 years if you changed nothing and continued communicating the same way you have been?



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