



# It's All Your Fault! Working with High Conflict Personalities

Hosted by:  
Illumni Institute

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## Hello, We Are High Conflict Institute.

Founded in 2008 by Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq. and Megan Hunter, MBA, we take a skills approach:

- understand & manage interactions with high conflict people (HCPs)
- communicate respectfully
- teach clients useful skills

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# High Conflict Personalities

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**PRIMARY TRAITS**  
of the High Conflict  
Personality

## BLAMING OTHERS

preoccupied  
with focusing  
on a Target  
of Blame

## ALL-OR- NOTHING

problem-solving  
dominated by  
all-or-nothing  
thinking

## UNMANAGED EMOTIONS

which are  
intense and can  
completely  
take over

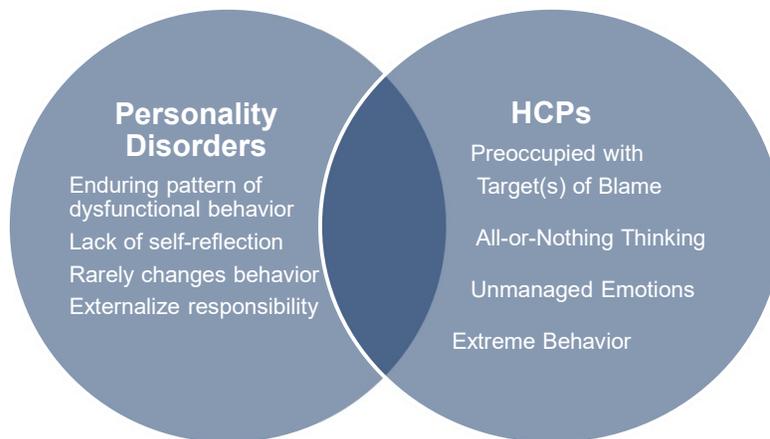
## EXTREME BEHAVIOR

or threats,  
which 90% of  
people would  
never do

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## Overlap with Personality Disorders



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# Personality Disorders

4 Essential Issues

**An enduring pattern of behavior, with:**

- 1: Interpersonal impairment &/or distress
- 2: Lack of self-awareness
- 3: Lack of behavior change
- 4: Externalizing responsibility

For some: blame universe, government, life in general.

Others: blame a specific person or group— that's your HCPs.

# Personality Disorders are Interpersonal Disorders

“[A] growing body of empirical research has also considered associations between personality disorders and the quality of functioning in specific interpersonal relationships, such as with **one’s children, parents and siblings, peers, and romantic partners.**” (Emphasis added)

Wilson S., Stroud, C. and Durbin, C. Interpersonal Dysfunction in Personality Disorders: A Meta-Analytic Review, *Psychology Bulletin*, July 2017; 143(7): 677-734. doi: 10.1037/bul0000101.

## Personality Disorders are Interpersonal Disorders

“Antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic personality disorders, historically classified as Cluster B (dramatic-emotional-erratic) personality disorders, all showed moderate-to-large and significant associations with **domineeringness, vindictiveness, and intrusiveness.**” (Emphasis added)

Wilson, et al (2017), *supra*.

## Personality Disorders Can Be Blamers

“Personality-disordered patients will often see the difficulties that they encounter in dealing with other people or tasks as **external to them**, and generally independent of their behavior or input. They often describe **being victimized by others** or, more globally, by ‘the system.’ Such patients often have little idea about how they ... contribute to their own problems....” (Emphasis added)

Beck, et al, *Cognitive Therapy of Personality Disorders*. 1990.  
pp. 5-6.

# Traits of Personality Disorders Impact Mental Health of Children

“For the first time, subclinical levels [short of the diagnosis] of Borderline, Antisocial, and Narcissistic PD symptoms in parents have been documented to predict behavioral and emotional difficulties in their children as early as the preschool age. When parents were **not cohabiting**, the variance of the children’s emotional problems explained by parental symptoms **increased more than six times**. Child services providers need to have knowledge of those deviant personality traits in parents that may represent a possible peril to their children’s mental health, even when parental PD is not diagnosable.”

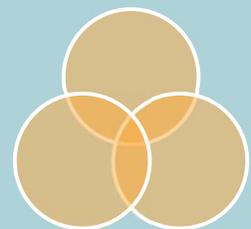
Berg-Nielsen, T.S. and Wichstrom, L. “**The mental health of preschoolers in a Norwegian population-based study** when their parents have symptoms of borderline, antisocial, and narcissistic personality disorders: at the mercy of unpredictability.” *Child & Adolescent Psychiatry & Mental Health*. 2012; 6:19, p. 19.

## Clusters of Personality Disorders

<b>Cluster A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paranoid</li> <li>• Schizoid</li> <li>• Schizotypal</li> </ul>	Tend to avoid people
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<b>Cluster B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borderline</li> <li>• Narcissistic</li> <li>• Antisocial</li> <li>• Histrionic</li> </ul>	Tend to be high-conflict
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<b>Cluster C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoidant</li> <li>• Dependent</li> <li>• Obsessive-Compulsive</li> </ul>	Tend to avoid conflict
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## Disclaimer

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

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## Borderline

“Love-You, Hate You” Types

- **Fear of abandonment:  
clinging & manipulation**
- Seeks revenge and vindication
- Dramatic mood swings
- Sudden and intense anger, out of proportion
- Impulsive, risk-taking, self-destructive behaviors

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## Specific Tips for “Love You – Hate You” Types

- Listen with empathy. Stay calm and matter-of-fact when they get angry (and they will).
- Keep an arms-length relationship: not too rejecting and not too close
- Have clear boundaries—when you’re available and when you’re not, etc.
- Be consistent and predictable.

## Antisocial

### “Con Artist” Types

- **Fear of being dominated**
- Drive to dominate others in weaker positions
- Disregard for social rules and laws
- Constant lying and deception, even when easily caught (they don’t keep track of lies)
- Lack of remorse; Some enjoy hurting people

## Specific Tips for “Con Artist” Types

- Avoid trusting people who say “trust me” a lot. Maintain a healthy skepticism. Ask for documentation.
- Pay attention to your gut feelings—they often are the first to tell you to be wary.
- Sometimes they are dangerous. Don’t accept being bullied—get assistance.

## Narcissistic

“I’m Very Superior” Types

- **Fear of being inferior/powerless**
- Believes in a very superior self-image
- Absorbed in self, own needs, own viewpoint
- Feels entitled to special treatment
- Lacks empathy for others

## Specific Tips for I'm Very Superior Types

- Be respectful and resist insulting them (even though you will be tempted because of their arrogance and insensitivity to others).
- Resist their efforts to receive special treatment. Reassure them they are important, but that you must follow the rules and policies.
- Praise them for some positive effort/skill.

## Histrionic

### “Always Dramatic” Types

- **Fears being ignored and left out**
- Drive to be center of attention
- Constantly dramatic and theatrical
- Exaggerates and may make up stories
- Difficulty focusing on tasks or making decisions

## Specific tips for “Always Dramatic” Types

- Don’t get hooked by their stories. You can always interrupt the drama by moving on to another important tasks.
- Plan to spend more time getting ordinary work done with them.
- Emphasize how they can help themselves. Give them a sense of empowerment.

## Paranoid

### “I’ll Never Trust You” Types

- **Fear of being exploited**
- Endless doubts about friends, professionals, etc.
- Misinterprets ordinary events or comments as demeaning or threatening
- Bears long-term grudges
- Misperceives others as attacking him or her, so “counter-attacks” first (pre-emptive strikes)

## Specific Tips for “I’ll Never Trust You” Types

- Be as non-threatening as possible. Be reassuring, but don’t expect them to trust you.
- Don’t push them to open up about things. Respect their caution and desire to only reveal what they have to.
- Explain that policies require you to do certain things (so it feels less personal).

## Causes

1. **Biological factors**, such as genetic tendencies and temperament at birth.
2. **Early childhood factors**, such as early parenting “attachment” disruptions, child abuse or other trauma before age 5.
3. **Social learning/Larger Culture**: Attention and rewards for Drama, Mood Swings, Narcissism & Violence

## 2 Hemispheres of Brain (Flexible)

<u>Left Hemisphere</u>	<u>Right Hemisphere</u>
“Logical Brain”	“Relationship Brain”
Generally Conscious	Generally Unconscious
Language	Observes relationships
Thinks in words	Thinks in pictures
Planning	Creativity, Art, Intuition
Examines Details	Non-verbal Skills
Rational analysis	Facial recognition & cues
Systematic Solutions	Gut feelings
Positive Emotions Calm, contentment, etc.	Negative Emotions Hurt, anger, fear, etc.

Adapt your approach  
accordingly

**The 4 Forget About Its**

FORGET  
ABOUT:

**1 Trying to give  
them insight**

**Instead,**  
focus on choices

**2 Focusing on  
the past**

**Instead,**  
focus on the future

**3 Emotional  
confrontations or asking  
about emotions**

**Instead,**  
focus on thinking and  
doing

**4 Telling them they have  
a high conflict conflict  
personality**

**Instead,**  
focus on what to do

## 4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

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### C.A.R.S. Method®

1. **CONNECTING WITH E.A.R.**
2. ANALYZING Options
3. RESPONDING to Misinformation
4. SETTING LIMITS on Misbehavior

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#### Skill 1: Connect

## Connecting with statements that show:

Empathy  
Attention  
Respect

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### EXAMPLE of an EAR Statement™:

“I can *understand your frustration* – this is a very impactful thing in your life. Don’t worry, I will pay full *attention* to your concerns about this issue. I have a lot of *respect* for your commitment to solving this problem, and I look forward to solving it too.”

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# Fears and EARS for HCPs

## THEIR FEAR

For any of these:

- Being ignored
- Being inferior
- Being dominated
- Being abandoned
- Being betrayed

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## YOUR EAR RESPONSE

Use any of these:

- I want to help you
- I respect your efforts
- I'll pay attention
- I'll listen
- It is 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

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Skill 1: **Connect**

## Cautions about EAR

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## Cautions:

- Avoid believing or agreeing with content.
- Avoid volunteering to “fix it” for them (in an effort to calm down their emotions).
- Be honest about EAR (find something you truly believe)
- Maintain healthy boundaries.
- Don't do special favors or bend the rules when pressured to do so.
- You don't have to listen forever.
- You don't have to use words or these words. Use the EAR Statements that work for you.

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## 4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

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### C.A.R.S. Method®

1. CONNECTING WITH E.A.R.
2. **ANALYZING** Options and Dilemmas
3. RESPONDING to Misinformation
4. SETTING LIMITS on Misbehavior

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#### Skill 2: Analyzing

## Analyzing options Give them a choice

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**In high-conflict situations, don't focus on feelings.** You won't resolve their emotional issues. Just acknowledge their frustrations. Talk to the right brain.

**Instead, focus upset person on a choice.**

- The goal is to get the upset person focused on problem-solving, away from his or her emotions.
- This puts responsibility on the person to help solve the problem; puts responsibility on the person for making the choice.
- It gives them some power, when they feel powerless.

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## Analyzing options Writing a list

**Don't focus on feelings.** You won't resolve their emotional issues. Just acknowledge frustrations.

**Instead, focus upset person on writing a list of problems and/or options.**

- If possible, have the client write the list.
- The list can include any silly idea, realistic or not.
- The goal is to get the client focused on problem-solving, away from his or her emotions.
- This activates the brain's rational thinking skills

## Analyzing Options Making Proposals

### Teach clients to Make Proposals:

Any concern about the **past** can be turned into a proposal about the **future**.

### Proposals usually contain:

WHO does  
WHAT,  
WHEN, and  
WHERE.

**When they get stuck or go back to the past or come up with new complaint, just ask:**

**"So, what's your proposal?"**

## 3 Steps for Making Proposals

1. **Propose:** WHO will do WHAT, WHEN, HOW 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/how it would play out?”
  - “What do you see me doing in more detail?”
  - “When would that start, in your proposal?”
  - “How many weeks seems reasonable to you?”
3. **Structured response:**
  - Yes
  - No
  - I’ll think about it

**If it’s a “No,” just make a new proposal.**

## 4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

### C.A.R.S. Method®

1. CONNECTING WITH E.A.R.
2. ANALYZING Options and Dilemmas
3. **RESPONDING to Misinformation**
4. SETTING LIMITS on Misbehavior

## Teach BIFF Responses®

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

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

**Friendly:** Have a friendly greeting (such as "Thanks for responding to my request"); close with a friendly comment (such as "Have a good weekend").

**Firm:** Have your response end the conversation. Or give two choices on an issue and ask for a reply by a certain date.

## Lawyer & Client

**Dear Mr. Smith:**

I still have not received my copy of the settlement proposal that my wife's attorney sent you last week. She has had it and you have had it, but NEVER A COPY TO ME!!! You are irresponsible and unethical. And don't try to tell me you were busy with more important clients!

You have not been protecting me at all from my wife's lawyer's manipulations. She's running circles around you. I'm starting to wonder who wears the pants in your family! Are you competent or not!

Your disgruntled client.

## 4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

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### C.A.R.S. Method®

1. CONNECTING WITH E.A.R.
2. ANALYZING Options and Dilemmas
3. RESPONDING to Misinformation
4. **SETTING LIMITS on Misbehavior**

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#### Skill 4: **Setting limits**

## Setting limits on High Conflict Behavior

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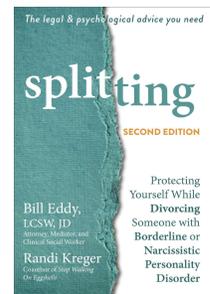
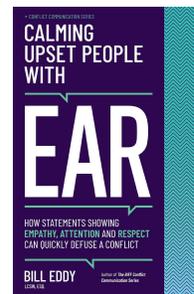
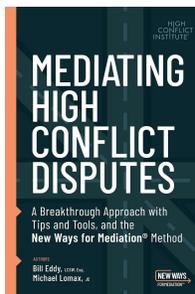
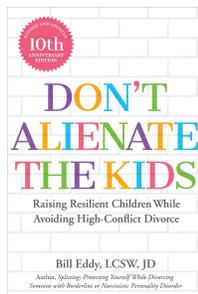
- HCPs need limits because they can't stop themselves
- With HCPs, focus on external reasons for new behavior (rather than focusing on negative feedback about past behavior):
  - "Our **policies** require us to ..."
  - "The **law** requires me to ..."
  - "It might appear better to \_\_\_\_\_ if you..."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

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# Summary of Key HCP Skills

- 1. CONNECTING:** Listen closely (briefly), then respond with Empathy, Attention and/or Respect (EAR statement)
- 2. ANALYZING:** Talk about choices, options, make a proposal
- 3. RESPONDING:** Be Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm (BIFF response)
- 4. SETTING LIMITS:** Don't make it personal. Use "Indirect Confrontations" by helping client deal with policies and procedures.

## Resources



[HighConflictInstitute.com](https://www.HighConflictInstitute.com)

### BOOKS

<https://www.highconflictinstitute.com/store>  
or anywhere books are sold.

# THANK YOU

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*the missing peace*

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