



Changing the Way You Experience Parental Conflict

3 steps to regain control of your high conflict divorce

1.

Stop
Attack / Defend
Behaviour

2.

Create and
Implement
Boundaries

3.

Avoid Court



1. Stop attack/defend behaviour

You know how it goes: an email pops into your Inbox, you read it, and your blood boils. The email is riddled with negative parenting comments and accusations. You instantly feel the need to defend yourself against the horrible words directed at you.

You want to somehow prove to the other parent that they are wrong. However, instead of just defending yourself, you throw in a few snide insults as well. Those comments are received as 'attacks' by the other parent. That parent reacts by defending themselves, and then throwing in a few more rude remarks while they are at it.

Just like that, the Attack/Defend cycle continues.

Many parents get stuck on this merry-go-round for years and sometimes lifetimes. They are attached to what the other parent thinks or believes to be true about them. They believe that by defending themselves, they will be able to convince the other parent that they were wrong to make the attacks in the first place

How do you get off the merry go round that goes nowhere?

DISENGAGE from the need to defend yourself.

Read that line again. It's important.

DISENGAGE from the need to defend yourself.

I have often heard parents say: "I hate my former spouse, you'll never guess what he or she just did/said".

Whenever I hear one parent say he or she hates the other parent, I know they need to work on disengaging.

Love and hate are on the same continuum. Both take up significant space in our lives. Love occupies space in our hearts, and hate occupies space in our minds.

By hating the other parent, you give them valuable space in your head.

That space could be better used to create a new way of engaging your children, dream of a new goal that you wish to attain, or imagine yourself successfully overcoming a challenge.

By removing the hate from your mind, you provide yourself with opportunities to spend more time enjoying your life and being happy with your children rather than engaging in conflict with the other parent.

When you are attacked in an email (or in person), your GUT reaction is usually to react by defending

yourself.

Practice disengaging from the need to defend yourself, rather than reacting. Take 24 hours to disengage yourself from the attacks and respond only to topics pertaining to your children. Easier said than done, but an imperative step to regaining your sanity while parenting with someone you are in conflict with.

You cannot change the attacks that are sent your way. Nothing you say or do will ever change the other parent; not their behavior, not their actions and certainly not the words they choose to use.

The **ONLY** thing you can do is to change how you respond to the other parent's behavior.

You can choose to disengage from the attacks. **You** can choose to respond only about what is important (your children). **You** can choose to stop defending yourself.

Just because the other parent says something about you or to you, it doesn't mean you have to believe it or prove it wrong.

It is a choice to disengage and ignore the hurtful digs, lies and manipulations. It is a choice to give yourself time to respond rather than react. It is a choice to stop defending yourself against someone who isn't listening anyways.





2. Create & implement boundaries

When you ask someone what he or she wants or needs, they usually begin by telling you what they DON'T want.

"I don't want my ex to speak poorly of me in front of our kids." "I don't want the kids dropped off 15 minutes late at every exchange." "I don't want to receive 15 emails or texts a day telling me everything I do wrong as a parent." "I don't want to be afraid or anxious each time the children are with the other parent." "I don't want to destroy our children's childhood because we can't stop

arguing." "I don't want to have our kids worried about where we will sit on their wedding day." "I don't want to fight anymore."

Very few people can actually tell you what they want. Even when pushed, they will tell you what they don't want. And when you focus all of your energy and attention towards what you don't want, you end up attracting just that, everything you don't want.

Boundary setting and implementing requires you to first figure out what you want/need.



"I need to feel safe in my home knowing the other parent isn't going to walk in unannounced." "I want our children to be well adjusted adults." "I want to have an amicable parenting relationship with the other parent." "I need to create effective communication strategies to ensure our children's needs are always met." "I want our children to know they are loved by both their parents." "I need to be less angry/anxious."

Once you understand what it is specifically that you want/need, then you can start creating a boundary with the other parent to ensure your need/want is met.

A client of mine was concerned that her children's father was continuing to walk into the marital home unannounced, even though they had been separated for some time. The father felt that because he was contributing to the mortgage and the utilities, he had every right to walk into 'his house.' It was imperative that she create and implement a boundary to ensure her wants/needs were respected.

The "WANT/NEED" – to have her children's father call or knock before entering the house rather than walking in unannounced.

The "BOUNDARY" – a conversation with the children's father around the confusion it creates for the children when their dad walks into the house unannounced when the kids know their parents are separated. It's sending a mixed message.

The "IMPLEMENTATION" – Once the boundary conversation has taken place, you must ensure you follow it. You **MUST! MUST! MUST!** follow the boundary you created. If you slip, even once, your boundary will be disrespected by the other parent and not followed.

The follow through

If you put a boundary in place, are firm in its implementation, and it's still not being followed, you will need to create consequences for boundaries not followed by the other parent.



The “BOUNDARY” – a conversation with the children's father around the confusion it creates for the children when their dad walks into the house unannounced when the kids know their parents are separated. It's sending a mixed message.

The other parent continues to walk in unannounced.

The “CONSEQUENCE” – the children find it confusing that you continue to walk in the house unannounced even though I've requested you call or knock first. My next step will be to change the locks should you continue to walk into the house unannounced.

If the other parent continues to walk in unannounced after the “Consequence” conversation, you must follow through and change the locks.

Creating boundaries will do nothing to move your situation forward if you do not implement them completely. This is why it's vital that you fully understand what your “wants/needs” are first. With a better understanding of your wants/needs, you will have greater will power to follow through on the boundaries you have created.

It may seem like a strange suggestion to help you sleep better, but it's vital. TV tells us that Judges are supposed to know who is lying and who isn't, and that the 'good guy' always wins. That judges are supposed to know that it's the other parent that's 'crazy' and you're 'sane'. That judges know that the children want to spend time with you, not the other parent.

Except we don't live on TV, we live in the real world. The 'real world', where parents and children are torn apart by lies, manipulation, and bullying. Families once whole, are now separated by infidelity, crisis and abuse.

Judges don't want to further fuel the existing conflict between parents. They don't want to say or do anything that may hinder better communication and stronger parenting in the future. They do their best to give every family the opportunity to be heard, and then make an educated guess at who is lying and who is telling the truth. Who may do the least amount of damage to the children while the children are in their care?

Do you want someone making an educated guess about who is best able to care for your children?

3. Avoid Court

A client of mine was recently caught up in the legal vortex known as the court. I had been hired, near the end of the court process, to offer online communication support between her and her parenting partner. She had been the primary parent while they were married. When she and her husband separated, both parents put her faith in the court system. The lawyers involved had not been given instructions to try and reduce the parental conflict, and to put the needs of the children first. The judges on the file (and there were many) were not able to figure out who was lying and who was telling the truth. Each parent had prepared 25 page affidavits swearing they were the honest parent. A parenting assessor was assigned, a report was produced, and then the parents could not come to an agreement about whether or not to follow the report. Decisions regarding the children were eventually made, a parallel parenting plan put into place, but it took 2.5 years of ongoing court action & legal fees to eventually reach a resolution.

But I want to go to trial! I want to provide witnesses to corroborate my story! I can prove to the judge I'm right", you say.

Nothing good ever comes out of a trial. EVER. Sure, each parent is given their allotted time to prove why they are the better parent, why they should have the children in their care. And in the next breath they are bringing up every last horrible event, spoken word and mistake the other parent has ever made.

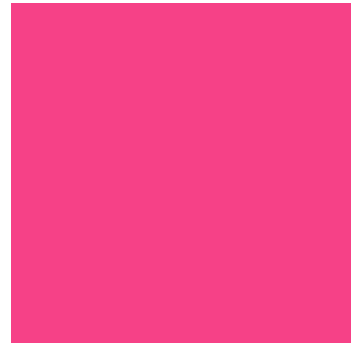
It doesn't matter what decision the judge makes, the parents are leaving the trial hating each other even more than when the trial began. How are they to move forward and parent their children?

Amicably after all there dirty laundry was aired for public record? How is that putting their children first, protecting them?

Utilizing the court system to reduce your parenting conflict ensures one thing, and one thing only; you will be giving up your power to make your own decisions regarding your children.

What other options do you have? There are countless options available to ensure you remain in control of who makes decisions regarding your children. Mediation, Divorce Coaches and Parenting Coordinators (to name a few) are available in most cities. If you have "tried that, it didn't work", try again. Try someone new. Anything you can do to keep your family out of court is worth its weight in gold.

Sometimes court action is unavoidable; safety concerns, direction of the court for parenting programs and criminal activity require court intervention.





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