

Disengage.
DECIDE.
Deliver.



How to make difficult decisions
with difficult people.



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You've probably never had to make so many decisions before in your whole life.

What will the parenting schedule be? What is best for the kids? Why does all the research contradict itself? How will we decide which sport or activities our kids will be registered for? Who will take the kids to the doctor? Dentist? Do we attend parent teacher interviews together? Do I have to ask to get the kids haircuts? What is the best way for us to communicate so our kids don't see us fight?

Parents in low levels of conflict have the luxury of being able to figure out a lot of their answers through regular communication.

But if you're reading this workbook, you're not experiencing low levels of conflict.

You are stuck in the murky, smelly, destructive home of high conflict decision-making.

Every decision you try to make creates an argument, an attack on your character, your ability to parent – leaving baffled and without an outcome.

OR...Every decision is made for you. You are told how things are going to unfold for your children, leaving you with no input or

say into how your children are raised.

OR...You are served a court application and affidavit each time you disagree with what your Ex tells you needs to happen.

I know exactly how this feels.

Exhausted. Guarded. Angry. Fearful. Anxious. Resentful.

And then one of three things happen;

- 1) You put off making the decision, avoidance becomes easier than the possible reaction you may get from your Ex.
- 2) You stick your heels in and force the issue over something that you didn't want just because you are sick and tired of being bullied
- 3) You give in to whatever the demands are, giving in is easier than trying to negotiate

And the cycle continues.

Exhaustion. Guarded. Angry. Fearful. Anxious. Resentful.

+ As each day goes by, you become more of a shell of who you used to be.

Trying to make decision with the high conflict personality in my life was like walking on a tight rope – if I didn't say the right thing at the right time, I'd get pushed off into the safety net – except that there was no safety net. I'd hit the ground hard. Each and every time.

If I said black, he'd say white. If I gave in and agreed to white, he'd say black. It really didn't matter what I said, I was always wrong.

Which is an important lesson for you to understand. When you are co-parenting with someone who may have a high conflict personality, it doesn't matter what the issue is. If one issue is resolved, another one will always surface.

"The issue isn't the issue" is what Bill Eddy of the High Conflict Institute always reiterates.

People with high conflict personalities do not have the skill set to manage their issues appropriately, so they just keep creating them.

Because if there is an issue, there is drama. HCP's thrive on drama. Drama is their comfort zone. While most of us freeze or panic during conflict, an HCP's heart rate slows down and they become calm.

Awesome. – note sarcasm.

Don't worry, there is hope.

But first let's figure out why HCP's love drama so much, why they have made it their comfort zone and have no intention of changing.

When someone is a healthy, functioning, rational human being, their brain functions work properly. Their thought processes sway back and forth between their right and left sides of their brain.

What does this mean? And how does it affect you?

Let's examine the role of each side of the brain.

The left side of the brain is responsible for being:

Analytical
Logical
Repetitive
Organized
Detailed
Scientific
Detached
Sequential

Rational Thought Reasoning

The positives of people using the left side of their brain is that they are able to be rational, have insight into their own behavior, understand consequences and have a reasonable conversation.

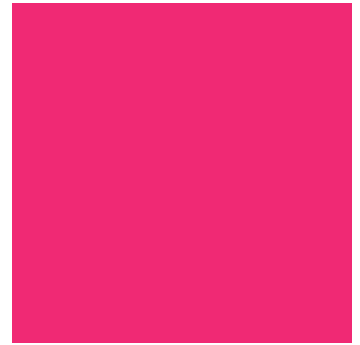
The negatives of people who get stuck in their hand brain is that they lack creative problem solving skills, aren't overly empathetic and often appear detached from the outcome. "Cold"

The right side of the brain is responsible for being:

Creative
Imaginative
General
Intuitive
Conceptual
Big picture

Negative emotions Irrational thought

The positives of people who are right brain dominant; they are creative and imaginative problem solvers, empathetic towards others, insight into their own actions and the actions of others.



The negatives of people who get stuck in their right brain; they get caught in negative emotions (conflict), aren't able to have insight into their own behavior and lack the ability to have a rational conversation. "Drama"

Everyone has a dominant side, left or right, but most people can transition into their non-dominant side relatively easily.

Right brain dominant people are generally:

- Artists
- Beauticians
- Politicians
- Athletes
- Craftsman
- Actors

Left-brain dominant people are generally:

- Scientist
- Lawyer
- Engineer
- Accountant
- Computer Programmer

Ok, that's nice, Andrea – but how does this information help you?

There is a small piece of brain matter that separates the left and right brains; it's called the corpus callosum.

It is believed that the corpus callosum acts as the channel in which brain messages are sent back and forth – from the left side to the right side and back again.

SO - When someone is a healthy, functioning, rational human being, it is believed that their brain functions are working properly because their corpus callosum is optimal size for messages to be sent back and forth.

When someone struggles with managing their emotions, their behavior and their thinking – like someone who may be a High Conflict Personality – it is believed that the corpus callosum is the root cause.

Research is suggesting that when the corpus callosum is not large enough for messages to go back and forth freely, people get stuck in one side of the brain or the other.



...if you are
co-parenting
with someone
who may be
a high
conflict
personality...

For our intents and purposes, if you are co-parenting with someone who may be a high conflict personality, the likely cause is because their corpus callosum is a little too small and they have gotten stuck in the right side of their brain (inflexible thinking, no insight, unmanaged emotions – conflict and drama).

How do you get these people back into the land of the rational?

Force them there.

It's not easy. They will rebel. They will push and scream and throw a tantrum.

Ignore the drama (which is what they are trying to distract you with) and stick to your guns. Revisit DISENGAGE if you need tips and strategies to ignore the drama.

Forcing HCP's out of the **drama infused** right side of their brain and into their left **problem solving** side of their brain will allow you to better manage making decisions with them.

Let me repeat that, it was important.

Forcing HCP's out of the drama infused right side of their brain and into the left problem solving side of their brain will allow you to better manage making decisions with them.

You've probably noticed that when you try to communicate with your high conflict Ex that they end up talking in circles, mostly condescending put downs about you and your parenting skills, but rarely is a decision reached.

Or maybe your Ex just tells you the outcome before a conversation is even had?

I find HCP's like to talk for the sake of hearing themselves talk, they don't usually have anything important to say, but they talk as if they do.

Because the more they talk, the more drama they can create.

And we both know how frustrating it is to enter into a conversation that we've been anxious about having, only to leave it feeling even more confused, lost and bewildered.

So how do you change that?

How do you enter into a conversation – email or in person – and shift your right brain thinking into their left-brain so you can get something accomplished.

Easy. I've made a 2-step Decision Making Process for you.



2 Step Making Decisions with Difficult People

1. Have an agenda

I know, I know – DUH. Seems so simple. And yet so many people forget to make one.

Parents enter into conversations with a loosey goosey idea of what they want to talk about, what decisions they need to make.

They are so anxious about having the conversation that once they enter into it, they forget what it is they were wanting to talk about.

If you and your Ex are in experiencing high levels of conflict, you need to make sure you're prepared.

That your "I's" are dotted and "T's" are crossed. Because if they aren't, then you haven't fully prepared yourself for the conversation and you're more likely to get off track, talk too much about topics that don't matter and end up triggered.

Being triggered = Being in an Emotion.

And we both know by now that if you are in an emotion and talking to your high conflict personality Ex, nothing good can come of it.

So make an agenda. Talk only about what is on the agenda.

If you get off course, and your HCP Ex will try and steer you off course – so plan for it, look at your agenda to bring you back to the topics you need to talk about.

Your **HCP Ex WILL TRY TO STEER YOU OFF COURSE**, they want an emotional experience, they want drama.

They have no interest in making any decisions with you.

They want to criticize you, belittle your efforts, minimize your parenting and shatter your confidence.

You will have to use your skills to stay strong, remain disengaged and focused on the end result.

A decision.

2. Make Proposals

The next time you are having a conversation with someone who is venting, notice what they are doing. 1) They are usually stuck in an emotion and 2) not making plans to change anything and 3) talking about the past. They are stuck in the right side of their brain.

Think about some of your most recent conversations or email exchanges with your Ex, were they right brain emotional circle talking about the past or were they left-brain future action focused?

For some reason, our brain likes to hang out in the past. But that doesn't mean we can't train them to think about the future. It just takes a little work.

Bill Eddy, with the High Conflict Institute, says that any problem from the past can be turned into a proposal about the future.

You just need to know HOW.

Which is why you're reading this workbook – you want to know how to make decisions with someone who makes decision making difficult. You change the focus of the conversation from talking about the past to problem solving the future.

By making a proposal, you are solving a past problem while proposing a solution for the future.

Let me give you an example.

Proposal:

“I propose we divide the Easter holiday’s equally, allowing our children to spend time with both of us.”

Which sounds a lot better than:

“You’re so selfish, you never let me see the kids during special occasions and our separation agreement says I’m entitled to half of all holiday’s.”

See the difference?

The proposal solves a past problem (not having equal time with the kids during special occasions) and creates a plan for the future.

No blame, no defensiveness, no emotionally charged put downs.

Now, that’s not to say that your co-parent isn’t going to lash out at you and try to get you into an attack/defend yelling match – but if you have put the work into agenda and your proposal so you know why it is you are entering into the conversation/email exchange in the first place, you’ll better be able to disengage from the invitation to fight and focus on redirecting the conversation to the topic at hand. (Your agenda)

So how do you make proposals? Goes something like this...

HOW TO MAKE PROPOSALS PROCESS

WHO does...

What

WHEN and...

Where

Notice that **WHY** is not apart of the Proposal Process.

Think about the word WHY and why you use it, and how you feel when you hear it?

WHY can be a tricky word, often putting people on the defensive, depending on the tone of voice that accompanies it. And if you’re in conflict and wanting to get some decisions made, we want to reduce any possible trigger we can to ensure success.

When someone hears WHY, they hear judgment, even if judgment wasn’t the intent.

Proposals are not about the WHY, they are about the action. Try not to focus on WHY you are asking (or WHY your co-parent is asking) and focus on making a decision regardless of WHY the question is being asked



+ Most problems have more than one solution...

... but those solutions never get the opportunity to be explored because a fight usually erupts prior the exploration.

The million-dollar question: How can you manage your co-parent when they say NO to your proposal?

Easy: Ask them to make a counter proposal.

They aren't going to want to, they are going to want to hang out in their emotional right brain. They are going to want to know WHY you made the proposal. They are going to want to put you down, criticize your parenting and whatever else they say when they are trying to poke your buttons.

Don't react. Just reiterate your question, "What do you propose?"

They will keep trying to push your buttons – the right brain is a cozy place to hang out.

DO NOT REACT.

If you give in to temptation and react to their attacks, it's game over to try and have a proposal based conversation to get your decisions made.

Stop and try again another day.

If you can manage your disengagement, stay on track and remain focused on "What's your proposal?" Your co-parent's brain will slowly shift to the left and you may get a proposal out of them.

Or you may not.

Learning a new dance is difficult. You may need to try more than once. Or twice. It may take you 100 times of trying before your co-parent starts learning your new dance steps.

DO NOT GIVE UP.

Their brain is different than yours, it takes them a lot longer to move from the negative emotional side to the logical left side.

Their corpus callosum isn't as big as yours, they will be slower to catch on.

But they will catch on. "You can teach an old dog new tricks." It just takes a really long time.

So what do I do if my Ex refuses to move into his left brain and never offers up a proposal, then how do decisions get made?

Easy: "I have proposed x,y and z to resolve a,b and c. Please provide your 3 proposals regarding a,b and c by Friday otherwise I'll need to move forward with one of my proposals.

No digs, no emotions, no manipulations – but it is action focused. You have decisions to make, no point in stretching them out into a heated debate.

You clearly want to work with your co-parent but if they aren't willing to work with you, decisions still need to get made.

What if your co-parent makes a proposal and you are open to it, but you just have a few questions first?

Ask them, just make sure you have carefully thought them through.

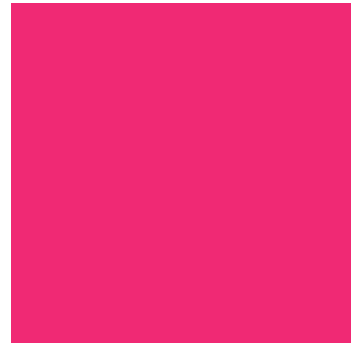
If you use the word WHY, a conflict will erupt.

Possible non-threatening, left brain focused, questions to ask:

- **What would your proposal look like in action?**
- **What is your picture of how this would work for you? For me? For our kids?**

Your answers to when, what, where and how will get answered with the above questions, without the other parent feeling judged or defensive.

Whew, that was a lot of information to absorb. Let's try to put it into action.





Proposals Practice:

Question 1) John and Lori have a 5 year old son, Ernie. They have separated and not speaking amiably with each other. They both love Ernie and want what is best for him. They need to decide how to communicate with each other about decisions regarding Ernie as he grows up.

For each of the following questions; write a proposal. Remember, there are no wrong proposals.

- 1) How do you propose John and Lori should communicate with each other (email, phone, text, in person)

Routinely:

Emergencies:

- 2) What are 2 types of decisions that John and Lori will need to make jointly for Ernie's best interests?
 - 1)

- 2)

- 3)

- 3) What are 3 types of decisions John and Lori can make on their own about Ernie, without consult with the other parent?

- 1)

- 2)

- 3)

- 4) As a 5 year old, what are two types of decisions Ernie could make on his own?

- 1)

- 2)

Write a proposal for John that you think they might both agree to:



Question 2) John and Lori would like to develop a shared parenting plan. John has read that 50/50 is best for kids, Lori has read that until the age of 6 that kids do better with a primary residence with generous involvement from the other parent. Their mediator has told them both that the best plan for children is one that their parents can agree on.

Lori's first proposal: I read an article that says it is best for young children to have one primary household but that the other parent should be involved every week. I propose that Ernie reside with me most of the time but that he spends generous amounts of time with you as well. I propose you would have 1 day and 1 overnight with Ernie as well as half of all major holiday's or we can alternate.

John's response: What day and overnight were you picturing that I have each week?

Lori: I was thinking you'd have Friday night and all day Saturday's each week.

John's response: I would say No to that as I read an article that says it's best for children to have roughly equal time with each parent. Instead, I propose that Ernie spend 6 days and nights with me in a two week period, so you would have 8 days and nights in a row during the same time period. I recognize that she has spent most of her time with you up until now. Once she's six, I'd like a 50-50 schedule.

Lori's response: Which nights were you thinking of having with her?

John: I'd like a weekday overnight every week, like Wednesday's and I would like alternate weekends Friday at 5pm through Monday morning at school one weekend and just a Friday overnight the following weekend.

Lori's response: My answer is No. I think Ernie is too young to be spending that much time away from me, as I've been the primary caregiver all of his life. And it seems like a lot of back and forth for him, transitions are hard on kids. Having said that, I am open to consider more time than I had originally proposed, especially as he gets older.

John: But I want to be fully involved in his growing up – weekdays with his schoolwork as well as weekends...

John's second proposal:

Usually when we hear the word NO, we get defensive and angry. And when we get defensive and angry, we lash out and talk about the past.

"You never blah blah blah..."

You always blah blah blah..."

Notice that when you are working with proposals, you don't need to get defensive. NO doesn't equate to 'you are an awful parent and I'm saying No to spite you'.

NO simply means that you need to keep brainstorming new proposals.

So there you have it, two-step plan to make decisions with difficult people.

- 1) **Have an agenda**
- 2) **Make Proposals**

When we take the drama out of our decision-making, the decisions become easier to make.



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