

Disengage.
Decide.
DELIVER.



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You've received an email that triggered you but you took the necessary time to move your feelings around the attacks and manipulations that were fired your way.

It's been at least 24 hours since the email hit your inbox.

And you feel confident that you've disengaged.

You've decided that a response is required and/or you want to initiate a conversation about specific child related topic.

Now what?

I've got good news for you, once you've mastered Disengage and Decide – Deliver is the easy part.

If, after you've read through everything below and you still don't know how to Deliver the message you want heard, then go back and re-read Disengage and Decide.

When you're trying to deliver a message to someone who is high conflict, take everything you have ever learned about communication and turn it upside down.

Traditional **communication** courses encourage you to use the word "I", to describe how you are feeling, "I feel..." But as you'll learn below, using the word "I" is the LAST thing want to do when the person you are communicating with has high conflict tendencies.

Your goal for delivering your message is NOT to write everything you want to say to your co-parent.

Your goal for delivering your message is NOT to defend yourself against attacks and manipulations.

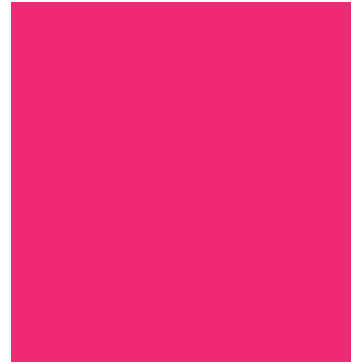
Your goal is to have important child related details heard by your co-parent.

If you want to vent about something or defend yourself from attacks, hire a professional.

DO NOT VENT TO YOUR CO-PARENT.

And DO NOT DEFEND YOURSELF AGAINST THEIR ATTACKS

+ As you've learned in the previous workbooks, defending yourself will only give your co-parent further ammunition to criticize, attack and manipulate you further.



Nothing you say to defend yourself against the attacks will change your co-parents perception of you. Save yourself time and energy and block them out rather than reacting to them.

Traditional methods of communication, when you have two semi-rational people trying to have a conversation and make decisions, simply won't work when one parent has high conflict tendencies.

So stop using traditional methods.

Stop using the popular TED method for communicating with your high conflict Ex. The TED method works wonderfully if both parents are rational, but if you're reading this workbook – you are likely co-parenting with someone who has proven to be irrational.

So what is the TED Method? How should two rational parents communicate?

Traditional TED method for communication

Tell the person how you feel

Explain why you feel that way

Describe what you would like done differently

Example: I feel angry when you don't show up on time to pick John up for your parenting time. It is disrespectful towards me by not valuing my time and hurting John's feelings when you are late. I would like for you to be on time

to show me that you respect me and to ensure John knows his mom/dad is making him a priority.

Tell: I feel angry when you don't show up on time to pick John up for your parenting time.

Explain: It is disrespectful towards me by not valuing my time and hurting John's feelings when you are late.

Describe: I would like for you to be on time to show me that you respect me and to ensure John knows his mom/dad is making him a priority.

Have you used a similar strategy when communicating with your Ex? How did it work for you?

Notice the word 'feel' at the beginning of the first sentence. Then the feeling words used in the rest of the paragraph.

The TED method will get you NOWHERE, fast, if your co-parent has high conflict tendencies.

Your Ex doesn't care how you feel and the more you tell them why you feel the way you feel, the more

a) disconnected they will get from what you are requesting and

b) the more they will use your feelings against you in the future.

Traditional TED method communication is like giving candy to a person who has high conflict tendencies.



It is important to remember: High Conflict Personalities do not have control over their behavior. They have NO insight. They do not have the ability to self reflect. They instinctively blame others for everything that goes wrong. They are not trying to hurt you on purpose, they just don't know any other way of communicating. They will not change.

To successfully co-parent with someone who is high conflict, you must change your behavior. Your Ex may still send attacks and manipulations your way, but if you are disengaged from them – the words and lies won't be able to hurt you. The words and lies will just roll off your back.

People with high conflict tendencies are like children during the 'terrible twos' – they tantrum to try and get what they want. And similarly to a child, if you give in to the tantrum and react, they'll know that their tantrums work to get what

they want and will continue to tantrum... each tantrum kicking up a notch to try and really get your attention.

The attacks and manipulations are tantrums. The next time you receive a horrible email, think of a two year old having a tantrum and DO NOT REACT.

The traditional TED method of communication doesn't work – so what does?

How do you communicate with a High Conflict Co-parent?

There are 4 key strategies that **work** when communicating with a high conflict person **if** you actually use them. That was a key sentence. Read it again. There are 4 key strategies that **work** when communicating with a high conflict person **if** you actually use them.



5 Email Communication Strategies to improve communication with your High Conflict Co-Parent

1) Stop Attack/Defend Communication

You can't stop the attacks from being said, but you can stop defending yourself.

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 stop the merry go round of attack/defend communication? Disengage so you can Decide whether or not you even want to respond. Stopping attack/defend communication will be the single most important thing you will do to regain your sanity during this challenging time.



2) Your email should only be 4 sentences long (or less).

You have SO much to say. So many rationales for the reason you are emailing. You need to defend yourself, point out the real truth, and then propose some options for moving forward.

Only you don't.

Your Ex may be a High Conflict Person. The more you write, the more ammunition you're likely to give them to twist and manipulate your words into meaning something entirely different than you were intending.

You are receiving long winded emails outlining every non existent shady personality trait you have; You are being called names that would make almost anyone blush; Your parenting skills are being criticized and ridiculed; Lies are being written about your character, your values, your family.

And every ounce of your being is going to want to defend yourself, correct the lies, point out the inaccuracies in the email that was sent to you. And I'm pretty sure that's the approach you've taken up until this point?

How has it worked for you? Are you getting the results you are hoping for? Are your emails allowing the message you want to send, to be heard? Has anything changed? Has the conflict between you and your co-parent been reduced? No.

Because defending yourself, your family and your values doesn't work.

Outlining the truth for your co-parent to read doesn't work. Rationalizing with an irrational person doesn't work. So stop doing it.

The goal for communicating with your high conflict co-parent is not to change their opinion of you – you can talk, email and text until you are blue in the face and their opinion of you will NEVER CHANGE.

You need to change your goal.

The reason you are communicating with your high conflict co-parent is to have important child related information received by them.

That is all. Read it again.

The reason you are communicating with your high conflict co-parent is to have important child related information received by them.

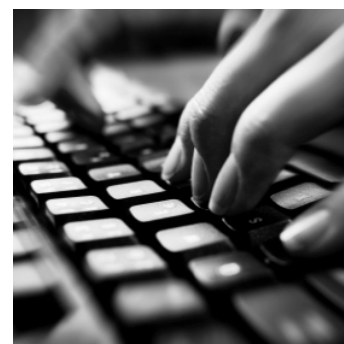
High Conflict People crave drama and the longer the email, the more likely it will contain an emotional word that they can attach to rather than absorbing the information you need them to read.

Keep your email communication with your High Conflict Ex to a maximum of 4 sentences.

It's a lot easier said than done. But by only writing 4 sentences, it forces you to be clear and concise about the topic you are communicating about.

It's been proven that people don't like to read long paragraphs. When there are too many words on a page, people skim read rather than read for comprehension.

The longer the email, the less likely it's going to be read.





3) Your email will not have any emotional words in it.

Emotional words are tricky – they sneak in when you least expect it. Why? Because when we're communicating about our children, we're usually feeling an emotion of some sort – fear, anger, excitement... disappointed, challenging, frustrated.

Or maybe you're not feeling emotional about your children; Maybe you're anxious or stressed about what kind of response you're going to get to the email you are sending – so you say more than you should (in person it's called nervous chatter, in email it's called writer's diarrhea).

Every single time you put an emotional word into an email, your High Conflict Ex is going to attach him or herself to that word and respond ONLY to that word. Which is what you DON'T want.

You want to ensure your message is received the way you intended it – not twisted and manipulated into something completely different.

(Note: your Ex may still manipulate your emotionless email to mean something than what you intended – but if you remove the emotion from your email, the likelihood of that happening decreases exponentially)

Emotional words include (but are not limited to): Fear, worry, concerned, anxious, scared, unsure, happy, excited, angry, upset, saddened, frustrated and stressed.

If you use any of the above words (or similar type words) your High Conflict Ex will respond to the word, and not the content of your email.

Communicating with FACT gives the perception of merit, truth and credibility. Communicating in emotion gives the perception of weakness, irrational behavior, mixed up perceptions.

There is nothing a Judge hates more than two parents who don't get along, than two parents who don't get a long AND have emotion filled email exchanges with each other – each parent trying to out **dig** the other parent.

Think about it; when you are reading books or newspaper articles – when you read about people being emotional or having an emotional response, they suddenly hold less clout in your mind.

"He's stupid!" "She's an idiot." If you hear/read those words, you aren't thinking someone intelligent wrote them. You're thinking someone emotional did.

As emotion goes up, the ability to be rational goes down.

You are the rational parent, make sure you present that way.

If, for whatever reason, a Judge ends up reading your email exchanges, you don't want the first impression to be "this person can't control their emotions, these emails are emotion based insults, clearly the person writing them isn't very rational."

No, you want a Judge to read your short, emotionless, fact based emails – giving your communication with your Ex the perception of credibility.



4) Your email will not contain the word "I"

This will seem petty and ridiculous, so be prepared; If you use the word "I" in your emails, your message will not be heard.

Your High Conflict Ex will read the word "I" and immediately shut down anything that comes after it. Your ex doesn't care about what you want, what you think, why you want what you want. And when your ex reads the word "I" – they immediately jump to "no" in their heads.

Example's using "I":

"I was thinking the kids could play soccer this Spring. Both kids loved indoor soccer over the winter and it provides them with great exercise." NO.

"I feel Billy should read for 30 minutes a day to improve his reading skills." NO.

"I would really like to take the kids to Banff, Alberta to experience the mountains during Spring Break." NO.

"I am going to host Sally's birthday party at the Zoo this year." NO.

Notice the theme of the above emails – they are all child focused (which you want), but also have the word "I" in them. And if you are co-parenting with a High Conflict Person, as soon as you use the word "I" – you've lost them. They will twist and manipulate your words and request and turn even a simple sentence into a giant fight.

Instead, try using your child's name at the beginning of your sentence. Using your child's name will catch your co-parents attention right off the get go – increasing the likelihood that your message will be heard the way you intended it to be

Example's using your child's name instead of "I":

"John and Sally have expressed an interest in continuing to play soccer this spring – thoughts?"

"Billy's teacher has suggested we read with him for 30 minutes before bed to help him improve his reading comprehension."

"John and Sally have expressed an interest in spending some time in the mountains. For spring break we will be going to Banff, Alberta for a few days so they can experience the mountains."

"Sally would like to celebrate her birthday at the Zoo this year. What dates work for you?"

See the difference?

In both examples the emphasis is on the child – but when putting the child's name at the beginning of the sentence, suddenly the email becomes only about the child and not about what you want for the child.

Your goal is to have your message heard. And by putting the child's name at the beginning of the sentence, you are more likely to have success with having your message heard.

No! No! No!

5) Your email will topic specific.

In an attempt to be efficient, you likely squeeze all your topics to be discussed with your co-parent into to one email.

- the dental appointment
- home work that is late
- what spring activity the kids will play
- Easter Break
- could he/she please refrain from criticizing your aunt Sheila, it's affecting the kids

The problem with trying to be efficient is that it makes it more difficult for your message to be heard.

If one of the above topics is a trigger for your co-parent, the whole response will turn into a manipulative, angry, controlling mess.

A response of to the above topics could be as simple as; "Kids want to play soccer, what do you think?"

BECOMES

"I never criticize your aunt Sheila, who do you think you are telling me what to do? The kids aren't playing any sports this spring unless you want to pay for them!"

Put the topic in the subject line of the email.

Then write 4 sentences or less on that specific topic, with no emotional words added in.

Your co-parent may respond to all of your emails in one singular email, and the emails may be filled with tone and lies (can't control the other parent and how they react/respond – can only control yourself).

BUT you've disengaged from their tone and their lies, you know they get stuck in their right brain – so you won't take their tone and lies personally.

Example:

Subject: Spring sports?

Sign up for spring sports is quickly approaching. Soccer vs baseball vs lacrosse vs swimming lessons? Or we can talk to Jeremy and ask him what he would be interested in playing? Please let me know by April 1st, xxxx.

Thanks,
Xxxxx

Example:

Subject: Moving

With property values dropping, I will be putting my house up for sale in June. I am looking at 3 different neighborhoods (x, y and z) as possible options for my relocation. Once I have settled on a place, I will let you know the new address. I have no intentions of requesting Johnny change schools, he is happy where he is and I will arrange transportation for him to get to and from school while he is with me.

Sincerely,
Xxxx

Example:

Subject: Income Tax exchange

Our court Order stipulates we should exchange our income tax information in May of each year to determine the child support base and section 7 numbers. I will have my income tax information ready for you on May 1st, 2xxx. Please let me know by April 15th, 2xxx when I will be receiving your information.

6) Your email should have a respond by date

Notice the above examples. They all have a 'respond by date'.

Why is this?

You are co-parenting with someone who may or may not have an undiagnosed personality disorder, someone who manipulates and controls, someone who wouldn't think twice about lying to the courts.

You are changing the way you communicate with your Ex for two reasons.

- 1) To save your sanity (See Disengage and Decide)

AND

- 2) So you can act, move forward, go to court if need be – knowing that you've covered all your bases.

There is nothing more frustrating than sending an email that requires a response, only to have it ignored. You never get a response. You never get an answer to your question. You're just left in limbo.

You put a respond by date so that you can act if no response is given.

"Act" does not mean you will automatically go to court if you don't have a response by a certain date.

"Act" means that if you don't have a response by a certain date, you are moving forward with what you've proposed in the email.

And if your Ex is disgruntled and takes YOU to court – you have your bases covered.

You tried to communicate with your Ex, you tried to include them in the decision making process, you tried to get their input.

You were clear and emotionless in your email communication regarding your request, you asked for a response by a certain date, you didn't get one.

So you moved forward.

A Judge hearing the matter would (in all likelihood) review the matter and question your Ex as to why they chose court as a means of resolving the matter rather than just responding to the email.

Your high conflict Ex uses avoidance as a means to control – take back control and put in a respond by date in all of your email communications.

Of course, you need to be reasonable in your request. Don't put a 'respond by date' that is an hour after you send the email – that's not fair.

A 'respond by date' 48-72 hours into the future is a reasonable time frame request.





+ Review:

How to DELIVER an email to someone who is HIGH CONFLICT

Communication Goal:


To have your message heard.

How you do that:

- 1) Stop Attack/Defend Behavior
- 2) Your email should only be 4 sentences long (or less)
- 3) Your email will not have any emotional words in it
- 4) Your email will not contain the word "I"
- 5) Your email will be topic specific
- 6) Your email will have a "respond by date"

If you are struggling to use the above skills to write your email, re-read Disengage, Have-Feel-Move and Decide.

For additional support navigating your high conflict separation and/or divorce please contact Andrea LaRochelle





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