



RESOURCE GUIDE FOR HIGH CONFLICT CO-PARENTING

At Barkus Law, we are committed to helping you find the resources you need for your family. Below is a list of resources that may be helpful to you. Please note that the following is for general information and not legal advice.

WHAT IS A HIGH CONFLICT PERSON?

The high conflict institute defines a high conflict person (HCP) as someone with a pattern of behavior that increases conflict rather than reducing or resolving it. This usually happens over and over again in many different situations with many different people. The issue that seems in conflict is not what is increasing the conflict. With HCPs the high-conflict pattern of behavior is the issue, including a lot of:

- **All-or-nothing thinking:** HCPs tend to see conflicts in terms of one simple solution rather than taking time to consider several possible solutions. Compromise and flexibility seem impossible to them, as though they could not survive if things did not turn out absolutely their way.
- **Unmanaged emotions:** HCPs tend to become very emotional about their points of view and often react with their intense fear, anger, yelling or disrespect. Their emotions are often way out of proportion to the issue. They often seem unable to control their own emotions and may regret them afterwards – or defend them as totally appropriate, and insist that you should too.
- **Extreme behaviours:** This may include shoving or hitting, spreading rumors or outright lies, trying to have obsessive contact and keep track of your every move – or refusing to have any contact, even though you may be depending on them to respond. Many of their extreme behaviors are related to losing control over their emotions, such as suddenly throwing things or making very mean statements to those they care about the most. Other behaviors are related to an intense drive to control those closest to them, such as hiding your personal items, keeping you from leaving a conversation, threatening extreme action if you don't agree, or physically abusing you.
- **Blaming others:** Its all YOUR FAULT. If you've heard this more than once, you might be dealing with a HCP. One common trait of HCP's is the intensity of their blame for others – especially for those closest to them or in authority positions over them. For them, it is highly personal and feels like they might not survive if things don't go their way. So they focus on attacking and blaming someone else and find fault with everything that person does, even though it may be quite minor or non-existent compared to the high-conflict behavior of the HCP. In contrast to their blame of others, they can see no fault in themselves and see themselves as free of all responsibility for the problem.



CO-PARENTING WITH A HIGH CONFLICT PERSON- SOME DO'S AND DON'T

It is not easy dealing with someone who cannot manage their emotions. This is especially true in any parenting situation, which make create stress or disagreement, which only makes things worse for a HCP. If you add divorce or separation, such as a relationship breakup, to the mix, chances are the situation has become difficult. While you can't change the other parent, there are things you can do, or not do, to make yours and your children's lives easier.

DO's

- **Keep communication brief and to the point:** The High Conflict Institute uses the term Brief, Informative, Friendly and Factual. Keep all conversations and messages short and to the point. Do not get drawn into an emotional discussion or try to prove that you are right and the other person is wrong. This adds fuel to the fire.
- **Set firm boundaries:** You will likely need to set limits on any interactions. For example, a HCP may email or text you repeatedly (and seemingly endlessly) for an immediate response on something that can wait. Rather than reacting or ignoring, both of which will likely escalate the conflict, set a boundary in advance, such as: I will not be able to respond to messages during the day, but will respond by 9 p.m./9am.

DON'Ts

- **Respond to emotional or verbal attacks:** As tough as it may be, respond only to what needs to be addressed. For example, if there is a request to pick up the child at 5 pm, coupled with a paragraph about how mean/nasty/inconsiderate you are or repeating some past event, it is fine to respond- yes to 5 pm/no to 5 pm and leave it at that. Responding to the verbal attacks just adds fuel to the fire.
- **Allow the other person to divert from the issue at hand:** This is one of the most challenging aspects of dealing with a HCP, especially one who knows how to push your buttons. It is not uncommon for a HCP to deflect a conversation. For example, you ask his/her thoughts about putting the kids in summer camp and the HCP responds by yelling or demanding that you talk about something else first. While you may have to disengage from the conversation, do not allow the other person to go off course into a topic that does not need to be discussed, or one that will lead to an argument.



Other Resources for high conflict co-parenting

- **Online communication:** Two good resources for communicating with the other parent are Our Family Wizard and Talking Parents. For a small fee, you can both sign up for an account and send messages to each other. The site keeps track of all messages and responses and there is no deleting a message after it has been sent.
 - <https://www.ourfamilywizard.com/>
 - <https://www.talkingparents.com/>

- **Parent coordination and counseling:**
 - The Mental Health Association of Southeast Florida offers a variety of parenting and family support services, including a coparenting and divorce program. Their website is: <https://www.mhasefl.org/parent-family-services.html>

 - Tammy Berman MS
Florida Qualified Parenting Coordinator
817 S. University Drive, Suite # 121
Plantation, FL 33324
(954) 839-0106
 - Dr. Nicolle Goldfinger
1040 Bayview Drive, Suite 110
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33304
954 800-0818

- **Online resources**
 - **Cooperative Parenting Institute:** an organization whose mission is to promote the healing and enhancement of family relationships.
<http://www.cooperativeparenting.com/>

 - **High Conflict Institute:** Articles, books and other information about dealing with high conflict personalities in divorce and other situations.
<http://www.highconflictinstitute.com/>

