Managing High-Conflict Personalities with the CARS Method℠

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Presented by
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High Conflict Institute
What are the characteristics of difficult people?
rigid

manipulative

punishing

uncompromising

no self-reflection

charming

angry

lie/con

confrontational

hostile

blame

vindictive

rage

defensive

victim

victim

victim
## Effective Problem-Solvers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasonable Behaviors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to self-reflect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to empathize</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyzes options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accepts feedback/criticism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasonable</td>
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<td>Accepts place in society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate behaviors</td>
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<td>Manages emotions</td>
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## High-Conflict Personalities

### SITUATIONAL DIFFICULTIES
- work long hours
- hardship
- divorce
- job loss
- death of loved one

### High-Conflict Behaviors & Characteristics
- Rigid/ uncompromising
- Unable to self-reflect
- Difficulty with empathy
- Blames/avoids responsibility
- Jumps to conclusions
- Defensive/can’t take criticism
- Demands special treatment
- Creates ongoing drama
- Manipulative behaviors
- Frequent anger

### Personality Disorders
- Narcissistic
- Borderline
- Histrionic
- Antisocial
- Paranoid
- Avoidant
MISTAKEN ASSESSMENT OF DANGER

BEHAVIOR that's AGGRESSIVELY DEFENSIVE

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Cycle of High-Conflict Thinking
2 Hemispheres

**Left Hemisphere (Logic)**
- Systematic solutions
- Examines details
- Generally conscious
- Thinks in words
- Planning
- Language
- Rational analysis

**Positive Emotions**
- calm
- contentment
- peace

**Right Hemisphere (Relationship)**
- Observes relationships
- Generally unconscious
- Thinks in pictures
- Non-Verbal Skills
- Facial Recognition/cues
- Gut feelings

**Negative Emotions**
- hurt
- anger
- fear
Conflict Brain

PROBLEM-SOLVING BRAIN

• Slower
  takes time to analyze problems

• Flexible thinking
  many solutions to every problem

• Managed emotions
  to keep us calm

• Moderate behaviors
  to maintain relationships

Positive Emotions
calm | contentment | peace

DEFENSIVE BRAIN

• Fast
  shuts down higher thinking & problem-solving

• All-or-nothing thinking
  eliminate or escape the enemy

• Intense emotions
  drives fight or flight behavior

• Extreme behaviors
  to defend self from real or perceived life or death dangers

Negative Emotions
hurt | anger | fear
FEATURES OF HCP BEHAVIOR & CHARACTERISTICS

Some of or all of these

- ALL OR NOTHING / BLACK AND WHITE THINKING
- INTENSE / UNMANAGED EMOTIONS and EXTREME BEHAVIORS
- IDENTIFY AS VICTIM
- DEFENSIVENESS / LACK OF IMPULSE CONTROL
- PREOCCUPIED WITH BLAMING PEOPLE
TARGET OF BLAME

Always Shifting
Cycle of High-Conflict Thinking

1. MISTAKEN ASSESSMENT OF DANGER

2. BEHAVIOR that’s AGGRESSIVELY DEFENSIVE

3. NEGATIVE FEEDBACK
MISTAKEN ASSESSMENT OF DANGER

BEHAVIOR that’s AGGRESSIVELY DEFENSIVE

CONNECT WITH EAR℠
**Effective Problem-Solvers**

*Reasonable Behaviors*
- Flexible
- Able to self-reflect
- Able to empathize
- Takes responsibility
- Analyzes options
- Accepts feedback/criticism
- Reasonable
- Accepts place in society
- Moderate behaviors
- Manages emotions

**High-Collision Difficulties**
- Work long hours
- Hardship
- Divorce
- Job loss
- Death of loved one

**High-Conflict Personalities**

*High-Conflict Behaviors & Characteristics*
- Rigid/uncompromising
- Unable to self-reflect
- Difficulty with empathy
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*Personality Disorders*
- Narcissistic
- Borderline
- Histrionic
- Antisocial
- Paranoid
- Avoidant
Features of Personality Disorders

- **Lack of Self-Awareness**
  - Why they are the way they are
  - How they contribute to own problems
  - How to change
  - Why they feel upset right now
  - How they affect other people
  - What skills they have that do work

- **Externalize Responsibility**
  - “It’s the system that’s caused me all these problems.”
  - “The universe is so unfair to me. Why me?”
  - “I had to hit her, after what she said to me.”
  - “He’s the cause of all of my problems. Once he’s out of my life, everything will be fine.”
  - “The children would be better off if my ex was dead.”

- **Lack of Change**
  - Behavior becomes rigidly patterned
  - Causes significant social impairment
  - Causes significant internal distress
  - Evokes responses in others which “validate” their inflexible beliefs

- **Self-Sabotage**
  - They don’t gain insights from feedback
    - FEED FORWARD
  - These individuals often don’t behave or respond in their own self-interest.
# 5 High-Conflict Personalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Fear 1</th>
<th>Core Fear 2</th>
<th>Core Fear 3</th>
<th>Core Fear 4</th>
<th>Core Fear 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEAR OF FEELING INFERIOR</td>
<td>FEAR OF FEELING ABANDONED</td>
<td>FEAR OF FEELING IGNORED</td>
<td>FEAR OF FEELING DOMINATED</td>
<td>FEAR OF FEELING BETRAYED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>Overly friendly</td>
<td>Superficial &amp;</td>
<td>Breaks rules &amp; laws</td>
<td>Suspicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demeaning</td>
<td>Demeaning</td>
<td>helpless</td>
<td>Deceptive</td>
<td>Expects conspiracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-absorbed</td>
<td>Self-absorbed</td>
<td>Exaggerates</td>
<td>Enjoys hurting</td>
<td>Counter-attacks first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulting</td>
<td>Shifts to anger</td>
<td>Attention-seeking</td>
<td>people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mood swings</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Needs to feel              | Needs to feel              | Needs to be                | Needs to dominate           | Needs to feel               |
| SUPERIOR                   | ATTACHED & INCLUDED        | CENTER OF ATTENTION        | DOMINATE                    | IN CONTROL                  |
|                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
| Always Superior            | Always Attaching           | Always Dramatic            | Always Conning              | Always Suspicious           |
|                             |                             |                             |                             |                             |
National Institutes of Health study of over 35,000 people had following results for 5 “high conflict” personalities:

- **Narcissistic** = 6.2% (20-29 age group = 9.4%)
- **Borderline** = 5.9% (20-29 age group = 9.3%)
- **Paranoid** = 4.4% (20-29 age group = 6.8%)
- **Antisocial** = 3.6% (18-29 age group = 6.2%)
- **Histrionic** = 1.8% (18-29 age group = 3.8%)

All have substantial overlap with other personality disorders, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and suicide.

Gender of Personality Disorders

- Narcissistic (Inferior) (% Male: __, % Female: __)
- Borderline (Abandoned) (% Male: __, % Female: __)
- Histrionic (Attention) (% Male: __, % Female: __)
- Antisocial (Dominating) (% Male: __, % Female: __)
- Paranoid (Suspicious) (% Male: __, % Female: __)
Narcissistic

= 62%

= 38%
Borderline

53% for females
47% for males
Histrionic

- Male: 51%
- Female: 49%
Antisocial

= 74%

= 26%
Paranoid

= 57%

= 43%
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 develop your Private Working Theory

- Private (Don’t tell the person you think this)
- Working (Use it in adapting your approach)
- Theory (Accept that you may be wrong)
Take a RAD Approach

Just recognize potential patterns and adapt your approach. Don’t try to change them. Change what you do:

- **Recognize** a possible High Conflict Personality
- **Adapt** your approach accordingly
- **Deliver** your CARS response
4 KEY SKILLS FOR MANAGING HIGH-CONFLICT

CARS

Connecting  Analyzing  Responding  Setting Limits
To calm right brain

You’ll be frustrated by the HCP’s emotional reactivity and thinking distortions.

It’s easy to get emotionally hooked and to withhold any positive responses.

It’s easy to feel a powerful urge to attack or criticize.

**Instead, consciously use EAR℠:**

EMPATHY, ATTENTION, RESPECT
CONNECT WITH EAR℠ using body language

- Staying quiet
- Turn toward the person
- Eye contact (culturally appropriate)
- Take deep breaths
- Smile
- Lean in
- Look of concern/compassion
- Nod

(avoid looking at your watch, phone, computer)
**CONNECT WITH EAR℠**

**using words**

**Acknowledge the person is upset:**
- I can see this is upsetting
- Wow! You’re really upset
- I see you have strong views about this

**Let person know you care:**
- I care about you and want to help
- I want you to succeed here
- Look, I know you came here to get results, so I’ll keep doing my best to help you get there
- Tell me more
- Let’s explore a little more

**Connect with their feelings:**
- This would be difficult for anyone
- This must be really hard for you
- I realize this must be pretty frustrating
- I can understand that this must be difficult
- I respect your efforts to _________
- It’s been a difficult journey, for sure
Avoid believing or agreeing with content.

Avoid volunteering to “fix it” for them (in an effort to calm down their emotions).

Be honest about empathy and respect (find something you truly believe)

Keep an arms-length relationship.

You don’t have to listen forever.
FEARS and EARS

For HCPs

Their Fears
- Being abandoned
- Being seen as inferior
- Being ignored
- Being dominated
- Being taken advantage of

Possible EAR Statements℠
- I’ll listen
- I want to help you
- I respect your efforts
- I’ll pay attention
- I’ll work with you on this
- I understand this can be frustrating/confusing
Now, focus the upset person on a choice by shifting them into left-brain logic problem-solving.

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; and puts responsibility on the person for making the choice.

It gives them some power, when they feel powerless.
ANALYZE OPTIONS

So, what’s your proposal?

Shift them into left-brain problem-solving with:

What ideas do you have?
What thoughts do you have?
Take a minute to think about your options.
Let’s do some brain storming here.
Let’s engage in some problem-solving.
What solutions can you think of?
Grab a pen.....
Take a pen and paper and write a list.
The Analyze Option Steps

Approach this process by:

- Brainstorm several possible options – write them down
- Check yourself for High Conflict Thinking
- Select an option and analyze it carefully
CARS℠

Analyze Your Chosen Option

Key Questions

Is this option realistic and practical to execute?

Is there sufficient time to execute this option?

Will this option effectively resolve the problem or manage it successfully?

Does this option require the buy-in of anyone else and can I count on their assistance?
Analyze Your Chosen Option

What are the Pros and Cons of this option?

Be specific and ask yourself how important to me is each of these pros and cons.
- Rating 3 = very important
- Rating 2 = somewhat important
- Rating 1 = not important & can be a useful exercise.

What are the most likely “what if’s” and how will I respond?

Is there anything else I must do or find out to ensure the success of this option?
DO’s and DON’Ts for Narcissistic Personality Characteristics

“I’m Very Superior” Types

Don’t challenge publically

Don’t advocate for a proposal without demonstrating the advantage to the narcissist

Do maintain boundaries in a respectful but assertive way

Do maintain documentation of interactions for possible HR consultation
DO’s and DON’Ts for Borderline Personality Characteristics

“Love You, Hate You” Types

Don’t react immediately – which can create splitting among the staff

Don’t get pulled into the drama – becoming a “Negative Advocate”

Do check out the situation carefully

Do stay consistent and avoid the idealization/devaluation syndrome
DO’s and DON’Ts for Histrionic Personality Characteristics

“Always Dramatic” Types

Don’t accept their description or viewpoint as completely factual - remain skeptical

Don’t be drawn into a drama or accept the role of hero or fixer

Do provide time for review and reflection

Do set time limits on your attention
DO’s and DON’Ts for Antisocial Personality Characteristics

“Con Artist” Types

Don’t ignore or minimize your gut instinct

Don’t ignore signs that you or the company are being compromised

Do have accountability processes in place

Do document agreements and supervisory instructions
Beware of the overly-charming person

“For God’s sake, think! Why is he being so nice to you?”

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Keep an arms-length, client-centered relationship.

With HCP clients, think of yourself as with them in their journey to manage their own lives.

Manage your own anxiety:
- Avoid becoming too directive
- Avoid becoming too passive
- Stay with them; don’t fix them.

Take a no blame, no shame approach.

Their bad behavior is not about you!
Even when they say it is!

Like addiction: you’re not cause or the cure.

TIPS

It’s not about you!  Its about their lack of skills.

Avoid being a hero, or too guilty.

The issue’s not the issue.
The personality is the issue, so your relationship is your focus.

You’re not responsible for the outcome
just providing your professional standard of care”

Change their thinking? Nope!

It’s the parties’ dilemma.
Keep responsibility on them.

When they resist, tell them, “It’s up to you!”
Picture them as 5 year olds – confused and in trouble (think about the 7-year-old man).
RESPONDING to Misinformation

Maintain a Healthy Skepticism

Remain skeptical of the accuracy of the person’s information because there may be many cognitive distortions.

1. Confirm details
2. Respond in a timely manner
3. Clarify information to negative advocates
RESPONDING

BRIEF
INFORMATIVE
FRIENDLY
FIRM

Avoid:
advice
admonishments
apologies
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...”
ABOUT THE PRESENTER

L. Georgi DiStefano, LCSW, is an international trainer with the High Conflict Institute teaching workplace conflict resolution.

She recently received the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) San Diego Chapter Lifetime Achievement Award. She previously received a Clinical Social Worker of the Year award from the California Society for Clinical Social Work, and in 2014 she was inducted into the California Social Work Hall of Distinction.

Ms. DiStefano previously managed the Kaiser EAP program in San Diego, California, where she was Coordinator of the Critical Incident Team and worked with the Threat Management Committee. In private practice she provides EAP services to Value Options and Anthem Blue Cross.

She is co-author of the award-wining book *It’s All Your Fault At Work*. She has extensive clinical experience managing mental health, EAP services and addiction treatment programs. She retired, after fourteen years, as the Executive Clinical Director of the San Diego State University Center for Alcohol and Drug Studies and Services Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Program. She directed a multimillion dollar budget with over 3,000 active weekly clients.

Other Publications:

- New Way for Work Coaching Manual & Workbook
- Paradigm Developmental Model of Treatment
- Paradigm Developmental Model of Treatment Group Topics
- Paradigm Change: The Collective Wisdom of Recovery (in print)
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