



Practical Skills for Dealing with High Conflict People

Part 1

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THEY MAY HAVE PERSONALITY DISORDERS

- Enduring Pattern of Behavior
- From Early Childhood/Adolescence
- Extreme Thinking
- Extreme Emotions
- Extreme Behavior
- Interpersonal Dysfunction
- Impulse Control Problems
- Outside of cultural norms



Core Issues of PDs:

#1: LACK OF SELF-AWARENESS

People with personality disorders lack awareness of:

- Why they are the way they are
- How they contribute to own problems
- How to change

-- Aaron Beck (1990)

Cognitive Therapy of Personality Disorders

- Why they feel upset right now
- How they affect other people
- What skills they have that *do work*

So they don't gain insights from feedback.



**Core Issues of PDs:
#2: LACK OF CHANGE**

When person loses “flexible adaptation” & takes a “non-reflective stance” in social interactions:

1. Behavior becomes rigidly patterned
2. This causes significant social impairment
3. Which causes significant internal distress
4. This rigid behavior “evokes” responses in others which “validate” their inflexible beliefs

-- Efrain Bleiberg (2001) *Treating Personality Disorders in Children and Adolescents*



**Core Issues of PDs:
#2: LACK OF CHANGE**

So we often need do opposite of what’s evoked in us.

Resist fight or flight urges.

Resist disliking a party or being charmed too easily.



**Core Issues of PDs:
#3: Blaming Others**

The **High Conflict Personalities (HCPs)** externalize by focusing on a specific person or group – their **Target of Blame**

This leads them into intense conflict and a drive to control or eliminate the Target of Blame:

He’s the cause of all of my problems. If I can totally eliminate him from my life, everything will be fine.”

“I had to hit her, after what she said to me.”

5 “High-Conflict”

Personality Disorders

- “I’m Very Superior” (Narcissistic) Personalities
Demanding and demeaning, self-absorbed
- “Love you, Hate you” (Borderline) Personalities
Overly friendly, then angry, sudden mood swings
- “You’ll Betray Me” (Paranoid) Personalities
Suspicious, expects conspiracies, counter-attacks first
- “Con Artists” (Antisocial) Personalities
Breaks rules & laws, deceptive, enjoys hurting others
- “Always Dramatic” (Histrionic) Personalities
Superficial, helpless, exaggerates, center of attention

Prevalence of Personality Disorders (NIH Study 2001-05)

National Institutes of Health study of over 35,000 people had following results for 5 “high conflict” personalities:

<u>Narcissistic</u>	=	6.2%
<u>Borderline</u>	=	5.9%
<u>Paranoid</u>	=	4.4%
<u>Antisocial</u>	=	3.6%
<u>Histrionic</u>	=	1.8%

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

---Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 7/2004, 4/2008 & 7/2008

Prevalence of Personality Disorders (NIH Study by Age Groups)

<u>Narcissistic</u>	=	6.2%			
		65+=3.2	45-64=5.6	30-44=7.1	20-29 = 9.4
<u>Borderline</u>	=	5.9%			
		65+=2.0	45-64=5.5	30-44=7.0	20-29 = 9.3
<u>Paranoid</u>	=	4.4%			
		65+=1.8	45-64=3.6	30-44=5.0	18-29 = 6.8
<u>Antisocial</u>	=	3.6%			
		65+=0.6	45-64=2.8	30-44=4.2	18-29 = 6.2
<u>Histrionic</u>	=	1.8%			
		65+=0.6	45-64=1.2	30-44=1.8	18-29 = 3.8

Gender of Personality Disorders

Narcissistic =
 ___% Male to ___ % Female

Borderline =
 ___% Male to ___ % Female

Paranoid =
 ___% Male to ___ % Female

Antisocial =
 ___% Male to ___ % Female

Histrionic =
 ___% Male to ___ % Female

Gender of Personality Disorders

Narcissistic =
 62% Male to 38 % Female

Borderline =
 47% Male to 53 % Female

Paranoid =
 43% Male to 57% Female

Antisocial =
 74% Male to 26% Female

Histrionic =
 51% Male to 49% Female



Disclaimer

- This seminar does not train you to diagnose personality disorders.
- It may be harmful to tell someone that you believe that they have a personality disorder.
- Just recognize potential patterns and adapt your approach accordingly.
- Just develop a Private Working Theory

2 Hemispheres of Brain (approx.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Left Hemisphere</u> • “Logical Brain” • Generally Conscious • Language • Thinks in words • Planning • Examines Details • Rational analysis • Systematic Solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Right Hemisphere</u> • “Relationship Brain” • Generally Unconscious • Observes relationships • Thinks in pictures • Creativity, Art, Intuition • Non-verbal Skills • Facial recognition & cues • Gut feelings |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Emotions • Calm, contentment, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Emotions • Hurt, anger, fear, etc. |

Corpus Callosum

- The “bridge” wiring between the hemispheres.
- Aids in the flow of information back and forth. More flow is better.
- It’s smaller in repeatedly abused children.
- It’s smaller in adults with borderline personality disorder (possibly the result of abuse in childhood).
- Some people get stuck in rt. brain upset emotions; can’t access their left brain problem-solving skills.

Talking to the Right Brain



- Tone of voice and body language is amazingly important: Calm, confident, firm
- Avoid logical arguments in times of stress
- Avoid giving Negative Feedback (about the whole person, focusing on the past, negative tone of voice)
- Avoid threats: these escalate the HCP
- Don’t say they have a personality disorder



CONNECTING with Empathy, Attention & Respect

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 your E.A.R.:

- EMPATHY
- ATTENTION
- RESPECT

See article: *Calming Upset People with E.A.R.*



E.A.R. Statement

- Example: "I can **understand** your frustration – this is a very important decision in your life. Don't worry, I will pay full **attention** to your concerns about this issue and any proposals you want to make. I have a lot of **respect** for your commitment to solving this problem, and I look forward to solving it too.



Fears and EARs for HCPs

<u>Their Fear</u>	<u>Your EAR Response</u>
• Being abandoned	• I want to help you
• Being seen as inferior	• I respect your efforts
• Being ignored	• I'll pay attention
• Being dominated	• I'll listen
• Being taken advantage of	• Its just rules we all have to follow
	• I understand this can be frustrating
	• I'll work with you on this
	• I know this can be confusing



Cautions about E.A.R.

- 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.
- You don’t have to use words or these words.

Setting Limits with Empathy, Attention & Respect

- HCPs need limits because they can’t stop themselves
- With HCPs, focus on giving them E.A.R. statements and **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...”

Setting Limits with E.A.R.

- HCPs do not connect realistic CONSEQUENCES to their own ACTIONS, especially fear-based actions.
- They feel like they are in a fight for survival, which blinds them to realities.
- Their life experiences may have taught them different consequences than most.
- They can be educated by someone who shows them Empathy, Attention & Respect.
