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# **WHO ARE HIGH CONFLICT PEOPLE?**

## **SKILLS BEFORE DECISIONS:**

Can Difficult Clients  
Learn Decision-Making Skills?



Scottsdale, Arizona

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# WHO ARE HIGH CONFLICT PEOPLE?

In 2003, I used the terms High Conflict People, High Conflict Personalities and HCPs in a self-published book titled High Conflict Personalities: Understanding and Resolving Their Costly Disputes. (I couldn't get a publisher because they said there was no interest in this subject.) The term "high conflict" had been around for at least twenty years, especially in regard to "high-conflict families" in divorce. I wanted to shift the focus to describe and deal with individuals, since it seemed that many high-conflict families included only one high-conflict person – and that dealing directly with that person would be the most effective way to help the family.

Since I had been a therapist before becoming a lawyer, I knew about personality disorders, how confusing they were, how persuasive they could be, and some of the methods for treating them. Yet no one outside of psychiatric treatment seemed to have a clue about their behavior – and often reacted in ways that made things worse. Since I was also seeing the same personality-disordered behavior in workplace disputes and neighbor disputes, as well as non-divorce legal disputes, I wanted to explain to others what was going on. People with personality disorders were showing up in all of these settings as "high-conflict" people, where their behavior was interpreted as simply about the current "issue," rather than about the need for serious mental health treatment. Now, after a dozen years of focusing on this subject, I want to explain my current understanding of these terms in this article, and how to use them in a positive and practical way.

## An Observable High Conflict Pattern

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

- A. All-or-nothing thinking
- B. Unmanaged emotions
- C. Extreme behaviors
- D. Blaming others

**All-or-nothing thinking:** HCPs tend to see conflicts in terms of one simple solution rather than taking time to analyze the situation, hear different points of view and 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. They often predict extreme outcomes if others do not handle things the way that they want. And if friends disagree on a minor issue, they may end their friendships on the spot – an all-or-nothing solution.

**Unmanaged emotions:** HCPs tend to become very emotional about their points of view and often catch everyone else by surprise with their intense fear, anger, yelling or disrespect for those nearby or receiving their comments over the Internet – or anywhere. Their emotions are often way out of proportion to the issue being discussed. This often shocks everyone else. 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.

On the other hand, there are some HCPs who don't lose control of their emotions, but use emotional manipulation to hurt others. They may trigger upset feelings in ways that are not obvious (sometimes while they seem very calm). But these emotional manipulations push people away and don't get them what they want in the long run. They often seem clueless about their devastating and exhausting emotional impact on others.

**Extreme behaviors:** HCPs frequently engage in extreme behavior, whether it's in writing or in person. 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 at all, 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 or dominate 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:** HCPs stand out, because of 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. If you have been someone's target of blame, you already know what I'm talking about.

They also blame strangers, because it is so easy. On the Internet, they can be anonymous and make the most extreme statements. Even if they know you, there is a sense of distance and safety, so that extremely blaming statements can flow.

## A Predictable Pattern

Perhaps 15% of our society (and growing) seems preoccupied with blaming others a lot of the time. Though it's a growing problem, it's a predictable problem—and can be handled in most cases, if you understand it. Once you know some aspects of their pattern of behavior, you may be able to anticipate other problems that will arise and avoid them or prepare to respond to them.

HCPs seek Targets of Blame, because blaming others unconsciously helps them feel better about themselves. Blaming others also helps them unconsciously feel safer and stronger when they connect with other people. They're constantly in distress and totally unaware of the negative, self-defeating effects of their own behavior. In a sense they are blind. Since HCPs can't see the connection between their own behavior and their problems, their difficult behavior continues and their conflicts grow.

## The Underlying Personality Pattern

High Conflict People have high-conflict personalities. Conflict is part of who they are. It's a life-long personality pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting. Time after time, they avoid taking responsibility for their problems. Time after time, they argue against feedback, regardless of how helpful and truthful it may be. And time after time, they try to persuade others to agree with their rigid points of view and to help them attack their Targets of Blame. The issues come and go, but their personality traits keep them in conflict. Their problems remain unresolved and the stress on those around them often increases.

From my own experience and the feedback of many people who take our seminars with High Conflict Institute, the HCP personality pattern seems to be the same, regardless of the kind of conflict or who else is involved:

### **Underlying High-Conflict Personality Pattern**

1. Rigid and Uncompromising, Repeating Failed Strategies
2. Difficulty Accepting and Healing Loss
3. Negative Emotions Dominate their Thinking

4. Inability to Reflect on their Own Behavior
5. Difficulty Empathizing With Others
6. Preoccupied with Blaming Others
7. Avoids Any Responsibility For the Problem or the Solution

Perhaps you know someone with this pattern. Someone who insists that you, or someone you know, is entirely to blame for a large or small (or non-existent) problem. If so, he or she may be an HCP. However, before you rush to tell that person that he or she is an HCP, remember: Do not openly label people and don't use this information as a weapon. It will make your life much more difficult if you do.

## Personality Disorders

Is a high-conflict personality the same thing as a personality disorder? Not exactly, but there is a lot of overlap. From my training and experience as a therapist, I believe that the people who become HCPs have personality disorders—or some “traits” of a personality disorder.

When I worked as a therapist at psychiatric hospitals and clinics, I learned a lot about patients with personality disorders. Years later, when I became an attorney and mediator, I recognized that the people who were stuck in high-conflict behavior had many of the same characteristics as people with personality disorders.

A personality disorder is a long-term dysfunctional pattern of thinking, feeling and behaving that affects many areas of a person's life. People with personality disorders are not crazy or stupid, and some are very intelligent. Instead, they have “blind spots”—especially regarding their behavior with the people close to them in everyday life. They have daily personal problems which they keep repeating and repeating. Yet they don't recognize these problems and can't seem to stop themselves, even when their problems are obvious to everyone around them—and are harmful to themselves. They're stuck in self-defeating and self-destructive behavior.

People with personality disorders are psychologically unable to grasp the consequences of many of their actions. They have a psychological barrier against examining their own behavior, and therefore they don't change their own behavior, even when it would help them. Instead, they defend their actions and personalities—and remain stuck repeating their self-defeating behavior.

## **HCPs and people with personality disorders share three key characteristics:**

1. They lack self-awareness, especially of the effects of their own interpersonal behavior on others.
2. They don't change their behavior, even when receiving repeated negative feedback.
3. They "externalize" responsibility for problems in life, blaming forces beyond themselves.

In addition, HCPs have the following two behavior patterns which many people with personality disorders do not have:

HCPs are preoccupied with a "Target of Blame" – usually someone very close to them (boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, parent, child, best friend, etc.) or someone in an apparent position of authority (supervisor, company, government agency, police, doctor, lawyer, politician, etc.). They take aggressive action against that person, including lawsuits, employment complaints, spreading rumors, and even violence, in an effort to get that person to go away or change their behavior, so that the HCP will stop feeling so threatened inside. Many people with personality disorders do not focus on one person this way and are not able to sustain an attack against another person the way that HCPs do.

HCPs persuade others to be "Negative Advocates" – usually family, friends or professionals who help in blaming the Target – which escalates their conflicts instead of helping them calm down to solve their problems. Negative Advocates are emotionally hooked by the intense fear and anger of the HCP, yet they are usually uninformed. When they hear about (or experience) the HCP's extreme behavior, they often abandon the HCP, so that HCPs are constantly seeking new Negative Advocates. This ability to engage Negative Advocates enables High Conflict People to avoid confronting their own behavior, so that nothing changes and their "high-conflict" situations continue. Many people with personality disorders do not focus on a Target of Blame, so they don't recruit Negative Advocates.

## Maladaptive Traits

Many high-conflict people have some maladaptive personality traits, but not enough to have a personality disorder. They may have some self-awareness, make some efforts to change and blame others less. However, they still have a pattern of escalating conflicts, with Targets of Blame and Negative Advocates, so that they have the pattern of a high-conflict person. Therefore, HCPs do not always have personality disorders and people with personality disorders are not always HCPs. For practical purposes, the same methods apply

with anyone – including those with or without personality disorders – so you never have to figure this out.

## HCP is Not a Diagnosis

When I developed the terms High Conflict Person, High Conflict Personality and HCP, I did not intend them to be a mental health diagnosis, such as a personality disorder. My intention was to assist ordinary people in managing their professional and/or personal relationships with possible HCPs, not treating the individual as a patient. My intention was to make this information accessible to anyone who needed it if they suspected someone might be an HCP.

I recommend having a “Private Working Theory” that someone may be an HCP. You don’t tell the person and you don’t assume you are right. You simply focus on key methods to help in managing your relationship, such as paying more attention to: 1) connecting or bonding with the person with empathy, attention and respect; 2) structuring the relationship around tasks rather than reacting to emotions; 3) reality testing so that you don’t necessarily believe everything you are told, but also don’t assume the person is lying because they may honestly believe inaccurate information; and 4) educating about consequences, as HCPs are often caught up in the moment and can’t see the risks ahead.

Of course, the HCP concept is closely related to the issues and methods of dealing with people with personality disorders. But only mental health professionals can diagnosis and treat personality disorders. A diagnosis doesn’t have any effect on dealing with possible HCPs – because this is not a diagnosis. It’s a description of high-conflict patterns of behavior.

It’s better to learn about the predictable behavior patterns of HCPs and ways to respond constructively in professional and personal relationships. If you think someone is an HCP, use this information as a Private Working Theory and focus on changing your own behavior, not theirs.

# SKILLS BEFORE DECISIONS

## Can Difficult Clients Learn Decision-Making Skills?

This article proposes some solutions to recent concerns raised by family lawyers and judges.

- How do we protect the children from their parents' high-conflict behavior in separation and divorce?
- How do we create a shift from their negative engagement with decision-making to a positive engagement that helps parents help their children, rather than harming them, perhaps for life?

I believe the answer lies in a significant paradigm shift I call *skills before decisions*.

## Litigants Have Changed

Litigants were different when I became a family law attorney in 1993. The latest appellate court decisions were about setting spousal support and other family law precedents. The legislature had finalized the child support guidelines – although I remember doing them by hand! Community property division and separate property claims had been mostly settled in the 1980's. The vast majority of divorcing parties were represented by counsel and litigation was mostly about legal research, writing and oral argument – the skills we learned in law school. Litigants came to Family Court for decisions, then mostly followed those decisions.

Nowadays, with over 40 years of no-fault divorce laws, most divorcing parties never go to court. They make their decisions themselves or with the assistance of negotiating lawyers, divorce mediators, collaborative teams or family law facilitators. Today's litigants in family

court represent themselves and are generally viewed as “difficult” – whether they’re represented or not – arguing unnecessarily over their children, engaged in domestic violence, child abuse, child alienation, false allegations of abuse or alienation, hiding money, hiding children, and so forth.

In other words, the “legal issue” is no longer the issue. Their behavior is the issue. When the court makes a decision, one (or both) of the parties often doesn’t accept the decision, doesn’t follow the decision and no change occurs in their dysfunctional behavior as parents. Thus, they return to court over and over again to argue for more decisions, to appeal decisions, to enforce decisions or to punish the other side.

In other words, their problem isn’t a lack of decisions. Their problem is a lack of decision skills – especially under stress.

## Understanding Defensive Thinking

In simple terms, difficult parents are stuck in defensive thinking. This keeps them in conflict without resolution, which is why they are often called “high-conflict” parents. Neuroscientists have identified the amygdala in the right hemisphere of the brain as the trigger for much of our defensive behavior. It shuts down logical thinking and causes us to react quickly with fight, flight or freeze responses. Allan Schore, a psychiatrist, researcher and author at UCLA, tells us that most of the time our left brain is dominant. But in a crisis or totally new situation, our right brain dominates and this is where most of our defensive responses are located, including our intense negative emotions such as fear and anger. (Schore, 2003)

In other words, when litigants are emotionally upset they are truly not thinking logically. For survival purposes, defensive thinking is very fast, intense and includes the following:

- All-or-nothing thinking
- Intense emotions
- Extreme behaviors
- Preoccupation with blaming others

If someone was in a life-or-death situation, you could understand how this type of thinking helps them take quick action. After all, slowly analyzing conflicting information, staying calm, using mild behaviors and reflecting on yourself, are not good ways of surviving in a life-or-death crisis. However, separation and divorce are not life-and-death situations. Even though separation and divorce can be very upsetting, most people do not even use the courts to make their decisions. They are able to manage themselves without abusing

each other or the children, or making false allegations or alienating the children. What's different about the difficult or "high-conflict" litigants?

Further, brain research indicates that some people with personality disorders actually have an enlarged amygdala and a smaller corpus callosum, the "bridge" of neurons between the right and left hemisphere that help them work together. This combination seems to make it much more difficult for them to calm themselves down after they are very upset, so that they remain stuck in their right brain defensiveness even when it is not a crisis and this actually makes things worse for them. (Teicher, 2002)

In other words, such people lack the ability to easily move themselves back into left-hemisphere problem-solving when they are upset. This helps explain why doctors, lawyers, and other professionals may become high-conflict litigants despite their strong intellectual skills – they can't get back in touch with them when they are upset. They are stuck in their right brain defensiveness.

Does this mean that high-conflict litigants all have personality disorders, larger right amygdala and smaller corpus callosums? I would suggest that many have some traits of these problems.

I have written about this extensively in other books. (Eddy, 2006, 2008, 2011) However, the solutions I am going to suggest can be helpful to anyone, whether they have these problems or not. And research shows that even those with some personality disorders can outgrow the disorder by learning self-management skills – which may actually strengthen the parts of the brain that were weaker or smaller.

## Teaching Upset People Self-Management Skills

Borderline Personality Disorder is one of the disorders most commonly mentioned in high conflict family court cases and I believe it is one of the issues – at least having some traits of this disorder – for many high-conflict litigants. It is characterized by a preoccupation with fears of abandonment, wide mood swings, sudden and intense anger (often a cause of domestic violence) and the ability to look really good some of the time. One of the treatment methods for changing the behavior of people with this disorder is Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Key aspects of this treatment method include teaching skills for reducing one's sense of distress, managing relationships more reasonably and keeping one's moods in a more normal range. This method has been well-researched, but it takes a few years and can cost a fair amount.

An alternative that courts and legal professionals can consider is teaching clients – especially parents – skills for self-management that will help them calm themselves,

communicate more effectively and less emotionally, and make their own decisions. Ideally, teaching clients these skills would help them then teach their children these skills. After all, children imitate their parents as their primary way of learning. They also absorb the distress, anger and fear that their parents have when they are preparing for court and after being in court.

Teaching skills before decisions would take several paradigm shifts for lawyers and judges – but no new laws, as the basis for counseling and classes is already established in family code. I would suggest the following:

### Court orders for learning decision skills

High-conflict parents don't seek to change or learn new skills. They have to be ordered to do it. A good example of this is drunk driving orders into treatment. While many resist engaging in the treatment, I worked with many recovering alcoholics and addicts in the 1980's who became committed to recovery after several weeks or months in a court-ordered treatment program. This can work.

The court can anticipate that any case in which parents are fighting over custody of their children will become a "high-conflict" case and consume substantial court time. This is because the vast majority of parents do not fight over their children in divorce. We are talking about the small percentage with at least one parent with traits of a personality disorder. Reasonable parents simply don't produce alienated children, don't abuse their children and don't abuse each other. An easy bright line for making such court orders could be: When either parent requests restrictive parenting orders for the other parent, such as no contact, supervised visitation or very limited time (less than 20%) over the objection of the other parent.

### At the start of the case

It is very common for family courts to order counseling for one or both parents and the children, but at the end of the case or months into the case. This generally fails, as there is no accountability if the parent does not attend (because the case is over). Usually, high-conflict parents are so defensive about the court's decisions that they often refuse to go to counseling – especially if they are the parent who has been found to be the only one needing therapy.

By learning self-management skills at the start of the case, they can be less involving of their children in their case and more likely to be effective at making small decisions without the court's involvement. This also engages them in a positive activity related to their

decision-making, rather than focusing on the usual negative engagement of gathering declarations and witnesses against the other party.

Such skills will also help them make their own decisions before the court does, so that many cases can stay out of court that would otherwise tie up the court's calendar. They can learn such skills while waiting for hearings that are scheduled many months away. Such an approach also gives some counseling involvement from the start for cases that are seriously out of control or cannot be clearly determined as presenting a danger or not to one of the parties or the child.

### For both parties/parents

In some jurisdictions, the court can order either one or both parents and the minor child into counseling for up to a year. Teaching decision skills is most effective with high-conflict parents when they are engaged in practicing the skills with another person. Counselors are the ideal people for this, as they can help the parent process their resistance to learning the skills and their resistance to shifting their focus away from blaming the other parent. Counselors are trained in dealing with resistance and counselors can be trained in focusing on decision skills.

At the start of a case it is often very hard to know which scenario the court is dealing with:

1. The parent asking for restrictive orders is accurately describing a serious problem;
2. The parent asking for restrictive orders has a serious problem; or
3. Both parents have serious problems.

By ordering both parents to learn decision skills, neither parent is in the automatically defensive role and both parents learn skills that will help them and their children – the same skills.

### Use of a Workbook

Decision skills can be broken down into several parts, especially as they relate to the problems of high-conflict parents: Flexible thinking (such as learning to make reasonable proposals), managed emotions (such as methods of calming themselves with encouraging statements), and moderate behaviors (such as communicating by emails that are Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm). Using a standard workbook to learn and practice the skills further eliminates the parenting contest, as both parents will learn the same skills at the same time and be better able to teach these skills to their children using written exercises. Also, writing in a workbook helps our brains absorb material much more strongly than just thinking about it or talking about it. Writing also reinforces use of the left brain, which helps people who are stuck in their right brain defensiveness to get into problem-solving.

## For a short length of time

By ordering both parents to learn decision skills with a workbook, this does not have to take a long period of time. If each parent has an individual counselor for a few weeks, then meets with the children a few times, this can all occur within 2-3 months. This is often how long parents have to wait these days anyway for hearings on parenting matters. And they just might reach their own decisions and no longer need to use the court date. Teaching such skills could also occur in a shorter, group format such as in a class. While this loses the benefits of individual counseling, it can make it more affordable. This would not take the place of a parenting class, but could be inserted at any time or done before a parenting class.

## Required Paradigm Shifts

The most effective way of teaching these skills would require several paradigm shifts for lawyers, judges and family courts. It also requires an interdisciplinary approach, with the collaboration of all professionals involved with the family, including judges, lawyers, counselors and mediators. That way, all professionals can remind the parents to use the skills during times of decision making. Otherwise, parents can easily revert back to defensive thinking. I suggest the following paradigm shifts:

### Focus on decision skills, rather than parenting skills

This approach shifts the focus to teaching the specific skills that parents need to make their own decisions. By teaching them positive engagement in their own decisions, they are more likely to follow their own decisions and make the small decisions that are required to implement any coparenting plan.

### Provide positive encouragement, rather than criticism

High-conflict parents simply can't handle criticism – especially public criticism. This may seem surprising, given how obnoxious or aggressive they are. However, it's a one-way street for people with personality disorders or traits. They truly give out criticism all the time, but they can't tolerate receiving it. While legal professionals are used to disagreeing and criticizing each other in public debates, the average person isn't used to this and parents with possible personality disorders or traits really can't cope with this. (Ironically, the only people willing to drag their parenting matters into court these days are those who are the least able to handle the adversarial court process.)

## Realize that insight doesn't work for these clients

High-conflict clients lack insight into their own behavior, probably because they are stuck in their defensive thinking. Trying to argue with their logic or give them insight into their own behavior just makes them more defensive. Forget about it! They need skills, which is something they can learn, rather than insight into their own past behavior. They need to focus on the future as much as possible, and learning skills is one effective way to do it.

# Conclusion

High-conflict parents are difficult because they lack insight into their own problems, they are preoccupied with blaming others and they don't change. These are characteristics of personality disorders, but parents may just have some traits. In any case, they have a narrower range of behavior, but they still have a range. We can bring out the best in them or the worst, depending on whether we trigger their defensiveness or sincerely make efforts to help them learn enough skills, step-by-step, to make their own reasonable proposals and separation and/or divorce decisions.

The social environment matters to these parents. If we provide enough of the right kind of structure for them to learn skills, then we may actually help calm them down, make their decisions and help their children while they move on. Of course, some cases will always end up in court, but we can reduce their numbers significantly, I believe, by shifting the emphasis from making decisions for parents to teaching them to make their own decisions, using the approach I have described above.

The methods I describe above were used in the San Diego Family Court from 2009-2011 without funding or the ability to study it, but almost all of approximately 30 cases settled out of court. In 2011, I shifted focus to two jurisdictions in Alberta, Canada, which each received \$500,000 grants to implement and study this approach for three years. Preliminary results have been very encouraging. Initial results can be found in the report on pages 18 and 19.

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**FAST FACTS**

Participant risk factors:

- Two thirds of clients said their relationship was abusive
- In 40% of cases police had been called to the house and 19% had restraining orders
- Approximately half of clients returned to court at least 3 times prior to NWFF
- 89% of clients said parenting discussions led to arguments with their ex partner
- 90% of parents felt the children were negatively affected by parenting disputes

NWFF Results

- Total 99 cases referred
- 62 cases completed NWFF
- 33 cases resolved outside of court

SROI Ratio:

Year 1: 4.25 : 1

Year 2: 9.37 : 1

Year 3: 6.68 : 1

Average return over three years  
7.40 : 1

Contact Information

Medicine Hat Family Services  
477-3 St. S.E. Medicine Hat, AB.  
Phone: (403) 504-8026

*"We would not have got near as far in reaching agreement  
without the program" NWFF Participant*

**Program Background**

New Ways for Families (NWFF) is a three year pilot project funded through Alberta Justice and Attorney General offices and implemented by Medicine Hat Family Services. NWFF provides short term counselling for high conflict separating or divorcing parents who have ongoing custody and access disputes. The goal is to reduce potential escalation, assault or re-victimization in high conflict custody and access cases and to increase parent's cooperative parenting skills in order to ensure the children's best interests are addressed and harmful effects on children are prevented. In NWFF both parents are encouraged to avoid the cycles of ongoing parenting assessment and additional court applications, and instead focus on making positive changes during individual counselling sessions. NWFF focuses on three fundamental problem solving skills for parents: flexible thinking; managed emotions and moderate behaviours. The program encourages system coordination among justice, legal and social service practitioners, and reduces use of justice and court systems for resolving custody issues.

**Participant Outcomes**

Over the first 3 years of the program, NWFF completed 62 cases with an overall success rate of 53%. Of the cases completed, 17 resolved within the program and did not require further legal decision-making processes. A further 2 cases were resolved through Collaborative Law; following completion of the NWFF program, 12 cases resolved through JDR processes, 1 case resolved after mediation and in 1 case the parties reconciled.

**Theory of Change**

If separating or divorcing couples battling over child-custody and access, receive skill-building counselling that results in respectful communication, they are more likely to negotiate the best outcome for their children and to effectively co-parent into the future.

Program outcomes show that 42% of clients improved their parenting cooperation in areas such as willingness to accommodate changes in visiting arrangements, to act as a resource to the former spouse in raising the children, and improved day to day decision making about the children. 50% of parents noted improved cooperation on major decisions about the children. In 68% of cases, parents increased or maintained their involvement with the children. Outcomes for children included less acting out behaviours (50%); less symptoms of stress such as headaches, stomachaches; difficulty sleeping (35%); improved school performance (33%); and more interest in seeing the non-custodial parent (38%).

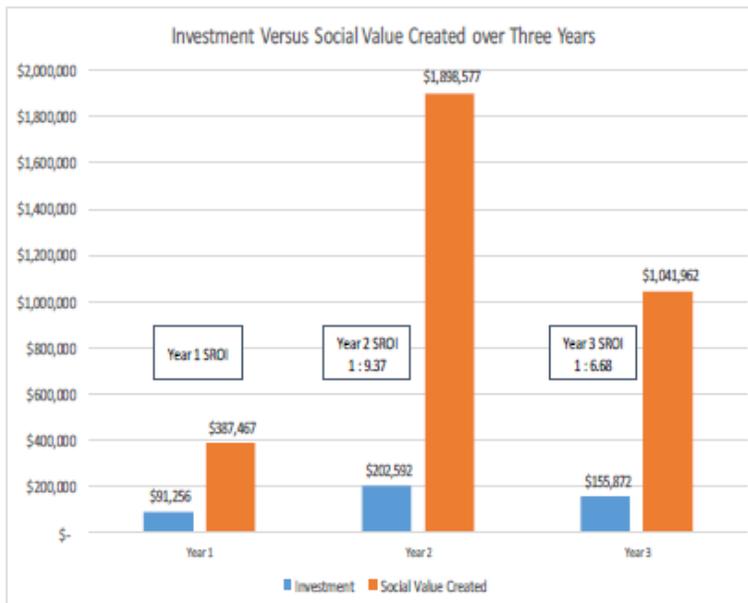
**Social Value Created & Valuing Change—SROI**

Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis was used to capture the social value of the outcomes produced by investment in the NWFF program. Through SROI analysis, the outcomes of the program were carefully mapped enabling a clear understanding of the links between program activities and the social *change* resulting from these activities. The analysis looks at the outcomes for 62 completed cases and 124 participants (not including children). In order to determine the total present social value created, outcomes were assigned financial proxy values to represent the social value associated with changes experienced by participants as a result of the program. These proxies included justice costs like court, police time, legal costs to both the system and the participant, mental health services, as well as costs related directly to the children such as Child Welfare interventions and personal impacts of stress and abuse.

*"The information I got out of it (NWFF) was priceless"*  
 NWFF Participant

**The Value of Annual Investment**

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of the NWFF program found that for every dollar invested the program created an average of \$7.40 in social value over the first three years of operation for every dollar of investment. Throughout the analysis, conservative estimations of social value were taken, and each proxy was considered in terms of the amount of the change actually attributable to the program (and discounted for that change determined not to be a direct result of the NWFF). Since not all social value can be adequately captured in financial terms, the values presented above represent the *minimum* value created through the program, and the actual value is likely higher.



**Looking Forward**

These results indicate that there is significant value in using the skills based NWFF intervention to help parents improve communication and cooperation in addressing custody/access disputes in order to keep these cases out of the court system where possible. By supporting these parents through the difficult process of establishing appropriate and fair custody/access agreements, NWFF helps to decrease conflict, stress and abuse while improving outcomes for children, leading to safer, healthier families and communities. The NWFF program should be continued and expanded to other communities.

# About

## Author

**Bill Eddy**, LCSW, CFLS, is a lawyer, therapist and mediator and President of the High Conflict Institute, which provides training and resources for dealing with high conflict personalities in a wide range of settings. He developed the New Ways for Families® method for potentially high conflict families in family court, and is the author of numerous books on many aspects of managing high conflict family court disputes. See full listing on the following page. Learn more at: <http://www.highconflictinstitute.com/about-us>.

## High Conflict Institute

High Conflict Institute was co-founded by Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq., and Megan Hunter, MBA, to provide education and resources to professionals handling High Conflict disputes, and to anyone involved in relationships with people who have High Conflict Personalities (HCPs).

We provide seminars and consultation to organizations upon request, as well as providing our own seminars for any professional facing High Conflict cases or issues. We are committed to changing the culture of conflict from one of all-or-nothing solutions, good and bad people, and shame and blame, to a culture of mutual empathy, attention and respect for all people while teaching new skills, assertively setting limits, and containing truly dangerous behavior. Learn more at: <http://www.highconflictinstitute.com/>.

## New Ways for Families

New Ways for Families® is a short-term counseling and coaching method designed to help parents strengthen conflict-resolution and co-parenting skills during separation or divorce. It's designed to save courts time, to save parents money, and to protect children as their families re-organize in new ways.

This method is offered in five models, and can be used in family court, mediation, collaborative divorce, or even after the divorce. The focus is on parents practicing four key conflict-reducing skills before the big decisions are made, and teaching these same skills for resiliency to their children. The goal is to help parents make their own parenting decisions *out-of-court*. Learn more at: <https://www.newways4families.com/>

# Also by Bill Eddy

[High Conflict People in Legal Disputes](#)

[Dating Radar](#)

[It's All Your Fault](#)

[BIFF: Quick Responses to High-Conflict People](#)

[So, What's Your Proposal?](#)

[Splitting: Protecting Yourself While Divorcing Someone with Borderline or Narcissistic Personality Disorder](#)

[The Future of Family Court](#)

[Don't Alienate the Kids](#)

[Managing High Conflict People in Court](#)

[New Ways for Families: Professionals Guidebook](#)

[New Ways for Families: Parent Workbook](#)

[New Ways for Families: Collaborative Parent Workbook](#)

[New Ways for Families: Pre-Mediation Coaching Manual & Workbook](#)

[New Ways for Families: Decision Skills Instructor's Guide & Workbook](#)

[It's All Your Fault at Work!](#)

[New Ways for Work: Coaching Manual & Workbook](#)